



The Richmond Journal of **Philosophy**

Issue Twelve Spring 2006

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on descartes

Peter J King
on petitionary prayer

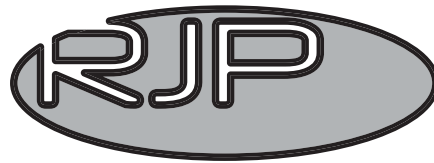
William P Kiblinger
on understanding socrates

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on sport



Richmond upon Thames College



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Editorial Board

Stephen Grant

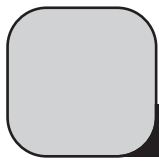
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[Editorial]

Welcome to issue 12 of the RJP. We begin with James Hill discussing the motivation for and originality of Descartes' use of a first person narrator to present his arguments in the Meditations. Our next paper by Peter King is in the form of a dialogue concerning petitionary prayer. In future issues further topics from the philosophy of religion will be presented by Peter King in this form. The third paper is William Kiblinger's assessment of how one should understand Socrates' attitude and aims and of whether the Athenian state was right to fear him. We then move onto a discussion of the motivations for and some of the challenges facing moral realism from Paul Sheehy. This issue concludes with Martin Bertman exploring the nature of sport.

Purpose of the Journal

The motivation for and ambition of the journal is to provide serious philosophy for students who are at an early stage in their philosophical studies. The style and content of the papers will be accessible to students who have yet to become hardened to the more technical and specialised journals of professional philosophy

What do we mean by 'serious' philosophy? First, the content of the journal is not constrained by a remit to appeal to or reach the interested general public. Whilst the papers must speak to the needs of students who are relatively inexperienced in philosophy, they presuppose that their audience is actively engaged in philosophy. Second, the content is serious in its focus on the central areas of philosophy. One must beware of the dangers of trying to impose more precision on a subject than its nature will allow. Therefore, some degree of caution is called for in talking of the central areas of philosophy. Nonetheless, the big or traditional questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics will provide the journal's centre of gravity. The third way in which the philosophy is serious is through the scope, variety and depth of analysis that can be achieved by the accumulation of papers over time. Moreover, each paper is not simply an introduction to one of the main topics on A-level, IB

or degree courses. Such papers will indeed have a role in the journal, but they will not be the only kind. Our contributors will be offering original papers based on their own research. The journal will be a forum for the kind of critical engagement and debate that characterise the practice of philosophy. The fourth way in which the philosophy is serious is in the contributors themselves. The vast bulk of the papers will be written by professional philosophers engaged in both research and teaching.

About the [Editorial] Board

Dr Stephen Grant is a full-time lecturer in philosophy at Richmond upon Thames College. He has also taught at King's College London where he completed his doctorate on the emotions. His main interests are in ethics, political philosophy and the emotions. He has published on the ontological argument and religious language.

Dr Paul Sheehy teaches philosophy at Richmond upon Thames College. His main areas of interest are in the philosophy of the social sciences, political and moral philosophy and metaphysics. His doctoral thesis was undertaken at King's College London on the ontological and moral status of social groups. He has published papers on voting, social groups, explanation and God. He has completed a book, *The Reality of Groups* (Ashgate) which will appear in 2006.

Paul Sperring is head of the philosophy department at Richmond upon Thames College and has been an A-level examiner in philosophy. He completed his undergraduate and masters studies at Warwick University, studying both analytic and continental philosophy. He is working towards his PhD in Philosophy at Birkbeck College. His research interests are in the areas of mind and metaphysics, and he has published on mental causation and Descartes.

[Editorial]

James Hill

Meditating with [Descartes]

René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* of 1641 is an extraordinary work. The metaphysical perspective presented in it marks, for many, the end of scholasticism and the beginning of modern philosophy. The radical doubts raised, the first principle of *the cogito*, the definition of the mind as a 'thinking thing', and the arguments for the existence of God, have all been treated as groundbreaking. But here I wish to draw attention to another extraordinary aspect of the *Meditations*, that of its form. Descartes presents his philosophy as a series of meditations, narrated in the first person, and this, as we shall see, is a highly original move. Indeed, to understand the project of the *Meditations* I believe we must ask ourselves the question as to why Descartes uses this meditational form.¹

Some philosophers might become sceptical at hearing this. They might say that this form of presentation, while it may be of interest to literary theorists, is irrelevant to the philosophy that the *Meditations* is concerned to expound. A philosopher should be judged by his arguments, they would say, and literary form should be set to one side in any proper analysis of the validity of those arguments. What I shall say here is designed to challenge such a neat separation of form and content in the *Meditations*. If we try to reach the content by abstracting from the form

of Descartes' work, I shall argue, we will often end up distorting that content and missing much of significance.

I The Meditational Genre

Let us begin by asking what the title 'meditations' might be meant to signify. The term has various specific uses today, most often referring to a Buddhist spiritual discipline. But in the seventeenth century, when Descartes was writing, it referred to a genre of Catholic devotional writing. This literature offered training designed to bring about certain intense religious experiences that might be broadly characterised as mystical. Meditational writings had two important characteristics. First of all, they were not primarily theoretical works, but were concerned with teaching and guiding a practice. They were not so much textbooks as manuals. They were meant to train the reader in a spiritual practice that would be exercised over a certain period of time, sometimes a matter of years. One would be reading them in the wrong way if one sought only to glean from them facts or doctrine.

The second important aspect of the meditational writings is that they were concerned with transforming the self. The exercises were meant to change the individuals who followed them; to make them perceive

themselves differently, to achieve a different way of being. They were not activities that had an external social or material significance, but concentrated instead on the inner life of the individual.

This tradition of meditational writing was one that, arguably, had its roots in antiquity with the Stoics. But in the seventeenth century, when Descartes was writing, the most influential meditational writer was St Ignatius of Loyola. Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit movement, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* which were promulgated in the Jesuit schools and churches. Descartes, who studied at the Jesuit college of La Flèche would have known them well. In fact, while at La Flèche, he would have gone on retreats in which students retired to the countryside to practise the devotional exercises that Loyola recommended. A second meditational writer we might mention was the Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz, or St John of the Cross. His meditational exercises were presented in the form of poems, written with great compression and beauty, to which he appended extensive commentaries. In his most famous poem, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, the poet describes a journey of the soul through a state of extreme desolation and hardship—'the dark night'—to arrive at a mystical union with Christ. Descartes' use of radical doubt has sometimes been compared with the dark night motif.²

There is one noteworthy difference

between the two meditational writers that we have mentioned. The first, Loyola, wrote in the third person. He recommended certain practices to the reader, that they should follow over a number of weeks. St John of the Cross, on the other hand—in his poetry if not in his commentaries—used the *first* person. He described the process of self-transformation from the point of view of one who undergoes the experience. As we know, Descartes' *Meditations* too are written in the first person. They have a narrator. How we should treat the utterances of this narrating 'I' is an important question that we will come back to. It would certainly be rash to assume that the narrator of the *Meditations* can, in any straightforward way, be identified with René Descartes himself.

II Meditating about Philosophy

The meditational genre was traditionally not a vehicle for purely intellectual reflections, certainly not for philosophy. It was concerned, as we have said, with guiding spiritual exercises, not with imparting information or persuading the reader to accept certain doctrines. One would not expect to find refined argument or metaphysical theses in a meditational work. Loyola was, himself, hardly the intellectual. He wrote in his native Spanish, rather than in Latin, in a style that was unpolished and immediate.

Meditational writings contrasted sharply with literature used in the Schools for the presentation of Scholastic philosophy. The Scholastics typically presented their metaphysics in treatises or 'summa'. The viewpoint would be a resolutely impersonal one. Definitions of important terms would be offered, and then chains of arguments, involving formal syllogistic inference, might be presented, arriving at conclusions. Treatises were textbooks *par excellence*, and they were designed to be taught to classes of students.

Now, the originality of Descartes' *Meditations* is that they present the central points of a metaphysical system in a form traditionally regarded as suited to devotional exercises. In appreciating why Descartes made this provocative departure from tradition we might bear in mind the two distinctive features of the meditational genre that we outlined earlier. Firstly, we said that meditational literature was meant to guide a practice. Descartes intends his *Meditations*, we may infer, as a guide to an *intellectual* practice. The philosophy here is more than just a chain of arguments, that might be analysed and assessed in a purely detached and neutral way. Instead it asks us to get involved in a more active way: to exercise, to train. This is perhaps why, in the Preface to the Reader, Descartes writes 'I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me'. Secondly, we should remember that the meditational literature was concerned with inner, *self*-transformation.

Descartes, we may infer, was aiming not just to relate to us his metaphysics, but also to progressively transform our minds to make that metaphysics more acceptable to us. We might expect his *Meditations* to help us develop certain faculties, and to turn away from faculties that we have habitually relied on. We must be ready to think differently.

III Leading the mind away from the senses

In what way are the *Meditations* meant to train our minds? The answer to this question must begin with the method of doubt, which is advanced at the beginning of the work in the First Meditation. What goes on here is actually, on one level, quite straightforward. Sceptical doubts are raised which have a sweeping significance. The arguments are relatively easy to understand: we are reminded that our senses sometimes deceive us, we are presented with the impossibility of finding 'sure signs' to distinguish dreaming from waking, and we are asked to entertain the hypothesis that we are mad, or that an evil demon might systematically plant thoughts and perceptions in our minds that are illusory. There does not seem to be anything difficult to *understand* here. It is surely surprising, then, that Descartes asks the reader (in his replies to objections to the *Meditations*) to spend weeks, or even *several months*, just meditating on the First Meditation.³ Why spend all that time, one might reasonably ask, when the arguments, with their general conclusion that all our previous beliefs should be doubted, are crystal clear? True, we may need to critically analyse the arguments, spot potential flaws in



them, ask whether they lead to the general sceptical conclusions that they purport to—but why months of meditation?

An answer to this is suggested by Descartes' remarks in the synopsis of the *Meditations* that he gives at the beginning of the book. Here he writes that:

Although the usefulness of such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight, its greatest benefit lies in freeing us from all our preconceived opinions, and providing the easiest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses.⁴

He presumably means that the doubts themselves form a kind of discipline. By entertaining them and making them vivid to ourselves Descartes hopes that we may prepare our minds for the metaphysics that is to come. In particular he means us to reduce our susceptibility to prejudice and to make us use our minds independently of what he calls 'the senses'.

Leading the mind away from the senses is a central theme of the *Meditations*, so let us try to understand what Descartes has in mind. In one superficial way, it is clear the senses are troublesome because they interfere with our thinking. Just as someone who has the television on may be less able to concentrate on a problem in geometry, so Descartes thinks that the senses drown out our intellectual abilities. We need to learn a technique to quieten the influence of senses if we are to make headway in intellectual matters.

But there is a deeper point here too. When Descartes talks of leading the mind away from the senses, he means a detachment from all *image-based* thought, whether of direct sense-experience, or of memory and

imagination. What does image mean here? The term is being employed in the broadest sense, not just referring to the visual, but to all sensory presentation. An image is a kind of picture: a representation of physical things in space. Now for Descartes imagination is also a faculty that pictures. When we imagine something we paint to ourselves, in one of the sense modalities, a thing that occupies space. Imagination, on this view, repeats to the mind the basic forms of sense: of seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting or smelling. So when Descartes is asking us to lead our minds away from the senses, he means generally that we should learn to think without the sensory pictures that the mind produces when it imagines.

It is in metaphysics that Descartes thinks use of images is particularly pernicious. He accuses one of the objectors to his *Meditations*—Pierre Gassendi—as having a mind 'so immersed in the senses that [it] shrinks from all metaphysical thoughts'.⁵ To understand why images disable metaphysical reflection in Descartes' view, let us take the example of a central metaphysical interest in the *Meditations*—the concept of the self (of the mind or soul that is subject to experience). To try to conceive of what the self is by using the imagination is hopelessly misguided in Descartes' view. If I try to imagine myself, or my soul, Descartes is convinced that I will end up with a crude form of physical representation, a picture of a material state. In fact this is exactly what the narrator confesses to having done, before he started his meditating. We are told that in the past, when he reflected on the nature of the soul, he '*imagined* it to be something tenuous, like a wind or a fire or ether, which permeated my more solid parts'.⁶ Clearly not only was this picture wrong, the narrator was

wrong to be *imagining* the self at all, he was using the wrong faculty. The result was just the kind of materialism that Descartes wishes to resist.

So the habit of using images in our thinking about metaphysics must be broken and one function of the method of doubt is to do precisely this. But a habit is not to be broken by a simple intention. (If this was possible giving up smoking would be easy.) What we need is a method, that may be applied over time. We need to gradually wean ourselves off our ingrained habits of thinking. In the case of dependence on the senses, we need to return, repeatedly, to the sceptical reflections—to meditate on them. Only thus can we break the spell of sense and start to do serious metaphysics.

IU Dreaming

But how might the doubts of the First Meditation lead us away from the senses and from image-based thinking. Let us take the case of the dreaming-hypothesis. This sceptical thought is never actually refuted until the final paragraph of the *Meditations*, it is therefore alive and active in the later meditations when, for example, the hypothesis of the evil demon has long been put to rest (with the proof of a good God in the Third Meditation). The whole work, it might be said, is played out in the shadow of the sceptical thought about dreaming, and the central metaphysical conclusions of the *Meditations*—about the self, God and the extended physical world—are all developed before the narrator can be sure that he is not in fact asleep dreaming.

Now, what exactly the sceptical point about dreaming seeks to show has often been differently interpreted. Some commentators argue that the

conclusion is that the whole of life might be a coherent dream. Others argue that the scope of the argument is more narrow, restricted only to the present moment. Again some commentators treat the argument as based on the psychological reality of sleeping and dreaming, while others treat this as incidental to the argument, and they see the concept of dreaming as equivalent to illusion in the broadest sense.

These questions of interpretation are important ones and should not be underestimated. However in one sense their solution is not vital. From the point of view of the role of the dreaming hypothesis in training our minds, the point being made is fairly clear. Treating sensory data as (quite possibly) part of a dream will be an effective way of relaxing the hold of the senses on our thoughts.

It should at once be emphasised that a dream for Descartes is essentially a matter of sense-experience. Certain basic non-picturing faculties are immune to the illusions of dreams and



it is precisely these faculties that Descartes wishes to encourage in the mental training he is putting forward:

... whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. It seems impossible that such transparent truths should incur any suspicion of being false.⁷

Later in the *Meditations*, near the end of the Fifth, Descartes's narrator will reaffirm that:

even though I might be dreaming, if there is anything which is evident to my intellect, then it is wholly true.⁸

The clearest deliverances of the intellect, then, crucial not only to maths and geometry, but also to metaphysics, remain unaffected even in a dream. The discipline of reflecting and meditating on the fact that one may be dreaming will, therefore, on the one hand, make us distrustful of the veracity of images from the senses while, on the other hand, it will help us nurture the utterly non-pictorial truths of the intellect. We are therefore given a method for drawing the mind away from the senses, and Descartes can, with some reason, boast to one of his objectors that while 'many people had previously said that in order to understand metaphysical matters the mind must be drawn away from the senses ... no one, so far as I know, had shown how this could be done.'

U The Narrator

Let us now return to the question of the narrator of the *Meditations*. We have noticed that the work is presented in the first person, but we have cautioned against any simple identification of this 'I' with Descartes himself. Often we find such an identification being unthinkingly made. We are told, for example, that Descartes asserts this or that, when in fact only the narrator does so. The narrator is, to be sure, Descartes' creation, but there are many functions that the narrator may have aside from simply revealing Descartes' own intellectual biography. What is the function of the narrator in the *Meditations*?

The narrator is perhaps best seen as a figure who shows us how the meditations should be conducted. He is a guide. But not a detached, didactic one, rather a fellow-mediator, whose problems and breakthroughs will typify those encountered by anyone on the same intellectual journey. To play this role the narrator must be a kind of everyman. He cannot bring with him any specific biographical baggage, because that might conflict with the reader's own story and thus obstruct the exemplary role of the narrating voice.

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The facts that we learn about the narrator are generally facts that might be true of anyone. For example, we learn that the narrator has accepted a large number of falsehoods learnt in childhood, we learn that the narrator sleeps and dreams, we learn that the narrator has 'firmly rooted in my mind' the concept of a creator God, and so on. Almost all Descartes' readers can be expected to identify with such characterisations. The narrator, on considering the Bedlamite-like characters who 'maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass' refuses to imagine he is among their number as 'such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself.'¹⁰ Clearly madness would be too extravagant a characteristic for our everyman guide whom all readers must identify with.

But the narrator does have one rather peculiar thing to say about himself. That is, he desires to establish something 'stable and likely to last' in the sciences. It is only this ambition that marks the narrator out as someone special. And this ambition is perhaps true of anyone seriously engaged in philosophy. The narrator is, then, perhaps best described as the archetypal philosopher.

But why, one might ask, do we need this everyman at all? Why is it not enough to just present the considerations that the narrator presents and leave them to the reader to adopt or refuse? I believe there are two important functions that the narrative voice has, and these are again closely tied up with the meditational character of the work as a whole.

The first point is that the narrator, however abstract and 'unfilled-in' a character he is, acts as a paradigm of how Descartes thinks the process of self-transformation will unfold. The narrator is a self, developing in time, that displays how the meditations will change the initiate who partakes in them. Thus, when the narrator experiences problems and resistances, all meditators might be expected to experience these. One problem he has is with a kind of inertia that prevents him from entertaining the doubts of the First Meditation for any length of time:

My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom.

It is because of these natural obstacles to the method of doubt that a new technique is suggested for coping, and aiding the process of doubting:

I think it will be a good plan to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgement from perceiving things correctly.¹¹

This technique involves the hypothesis of the evil demon. Here we see another good example of how what is usually considered simply as an argument is really a meditational technique designed to influence and train the mind of the meditator.

But there is a second reason why the narrator is indispensable. This has to do with Descartes' first principle, the

cogito. There is much debate as to whether this amounts to a deductive proof—perhaps a species of syllogism—or not. Some prefer to see it as a kind of performance which is self-validating, in some way parallel to saying 'I do' in a marriage ceremony, which renders actual the bond of wedlock. One thing is clear, though—the *cogito* relies for its power on its first-person form.

... this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.¹²

The *cogito*-type thought would not work in the same way if it was presented in the third person: 'He thinks, therefore he exists'. In this form one would be able to deny the proposition that he thinks (perhaps I am just imagining that he thinks, perhaps I am imagining him altogether). But in the first person, doubts about whether I am really thinking simply reaffirm that I am thinking, because my doubting is my thinking. So the undeniability of the *cogito* relies on it being presented by an I, and for this Descartes' narrator is the perfect literary device.

UI Form and Content: an Overview

What we have said here amounts to a number of suggestions of how the form of the text—in particular its use of the meditational genre—may have significance for our understanding the philosophical ideas in Descartes' Meditations. What has been remarked on here is really only a beginning. There are many other points that might have been developed. Our attention has been restricted to the First, and occasionally the Second, Meditation.

But a note of caution should also be

sounded. The *Meditations* remain a text replete with argument. There is no reason to think that the details of this argument can always be illuminated or reunderstood in the light of the form of presentation. For example it is unlikely that the ontological argument for God's existence in the Fifth Meditation can be helpfully analysed in the way we have been suggesting. What is being proposed here is only this: we should not assume that the form of Descartes' *Meditations* is always just an accidental feature which can be safely ignored.

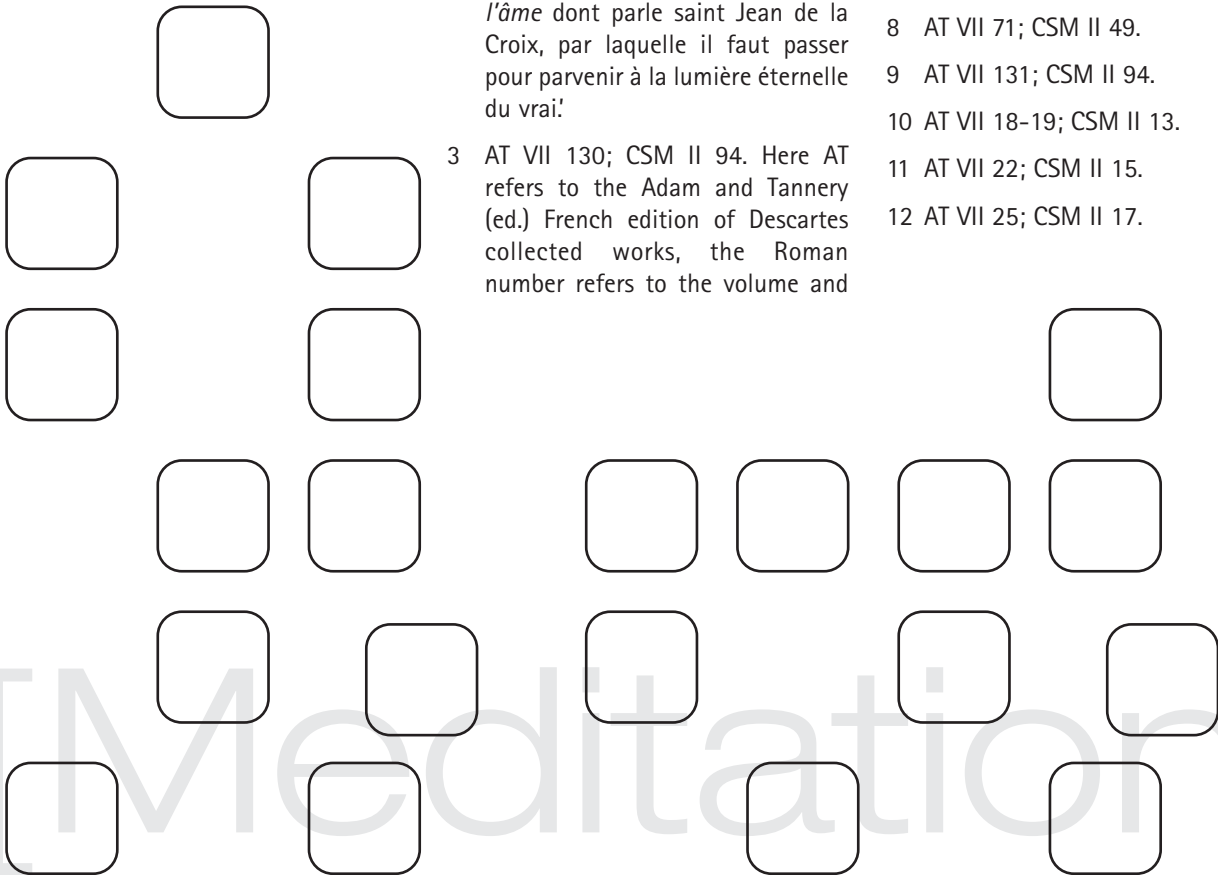


Notes

- 1 Attention has been given to the meditational form in recent commentary on Descartes. See for example the first three articles in Amélie Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, University of California Press, 1986. Perhaps the most important piece—and one that I am deeply in debt to here—is by Gary Hatfield, 'The Senses and the Fleshless Eye: The Meditations as Cognitive Exercises', included in the Rorty volume, pp. 45–80.
- 2 Jacques Chevalier in his *Descartes*, Paris: Libraire Plon, 1921, drew attention to the analogy here. 'Le doute méthodique', he writes (p. 212), 'est quelque chose d'analogue à la *Via purgativa* des mystiques, à cette *nuît obscure de l'âme* dont parle saint Jean de la Croix, par laquelle il faut passer pour parvenir à la lumière éternelle du vrai.'
- 3 AT VII 130; CSM II 94. Here AT refers to the Adam and Tannery (ed.) French edition of Descartes collected works, the Roman number refers to the volume and

the page number follows (*Oeuvres de Descartes*, revised edition, Vrin, 1964–76). CSM refers to the Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch translation of Descartes works into English, with volume and page numbers again following in that order (*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, 1984).

- 4 AT VII 12
- 5 AT VII 348; CSM II 241. Generally the objections made by Gassendi are interesting as they are made by a philosopher who, in stark contrast to Descartes, thinks that all reflection and thought is ultimately based on sense-experience.
- 6 AT VII 26; CSM II 17. My emphasis.
- 7 AT VII 20; CSM II 13.
- 8 AT VII 71; CSM II 49.
- 9 AT VII 131; CSM II 94.
- 10 AT VII 18–19; CSM II 13.
- 11 AT VII 22; CSM II 15.
- 12 AT VII 25; CSM II 17.





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Peter J King

[Petitionary]

Prayer

(A harbour-side café somewhere in the Peloponnese; the philosopher Anna Kalypsas and her students, Mel Etitis and Kathy Merinos, are strolling in the sunshine when they see Anna's friend, the lay clergyman Theo Sevvis, sitting at a table with a coffee and a newspaper. He sees them at the same time, beckons to them to join him and, when they do, orders coffee for them all.)

Theo: Now Anna, the other day you put off talking about prayer, but I think that you said that you were planning to discuss it today.

Anna: That's right, we are. I suppose it's something that you're interested in professionally, Theo.

Theo: Well, it is true that prayer is one of the main comforts that the Church offers.

Anna: Ah, well, we're not really going to be concerned with that; after all, the comfort, the psychological effect, would probably be the same whatever the truth of the matter, and it's truth that we're mostly concerned with. No, we were planning to talk about what's called *petitionary* prayer — when someone asks god to make something happen or not happen. It's going to involve the notion of miracles, though, which we discussed the other week.

Theo: Well, when I was back there in seminary school, there was a person there who put forth the proposition that you can petition the Lord with prayer. I remember one of my fellow students becoming quite heated in his rejection of that position, so I am acquainted with some aspects of the debate. Why does it have to involve miracles, though? After all, although many prayers ask for events that would be miraculous, not all of them do, surely?

Anna: I think they do, yes. You see, even if a particular kind of event can happen in the ordinary course of things, according to the laws of nature, still, if god makes it happen, then he's interfered with those laws. We might not be able to tell, but that's not the point.

Theo: Ah, like the lottery? Although any particular sequence of numbers *can* and *might* come up by the normal laws of chance, it would still be cheating if someone fixed the machine to make sure that a certain sequence does come up. You cannot look at the winning sequence and conclude that it must have been the result of cheating, because there is no obvious difference between a sequence

obtained by chance and one obtained by trickery.

Anna: That's it exactly. Even if god causes something like a storm, which would normally be a natural event, the very fact that god has caused it means that he's interfered with the natural law.

Mel: I see. So if a miracle has to be caused by god, then it has to be a violation of a law too.

Anna: That's right. It just doesn't make sense to talk about *god* acting in the world in a non-miraculous way. Is everyone happy with that?

(They all nod agreement.)

OK; well, the main worry I've always had about prayer concerns the very idea of asking a god for help, especially as many prayers risk or even entail harm to others.

Theo: Of course you know, Anna, that god does not answer every prayer. If he did, we might begin to wonder whether or not he existed.

Kathy *(breaking in a little hesitantly):*

I'm afraid I don't follow you Doctor Sevvis. If god answered all our prayers, wouldn't that make us think that he does exist?

Theo: Why, no Kathy. If every prayer were answered, we should doubtless begin to look for some connection of cause and effect between the act of prayer itself and its results. That is, we should think that the prayer produced the result, in the way that magicians think that their words and rituals do. It is the fact that prayers are answered selectively that leads us to think in terms of someone responding to us – someone who weighs our limited, often petty requests.

Kathy: Oh, all right, yes, I see.

Theo: But have I answered *your* worry, Anna? God does not answer prayers that would involve harm to others.

Anna: You've answered me up to a point. Still, you can't deny that the world is full of people whose prayers are of that type – and there are many who'd claim that such prayers have been answered. I suppose that you'd say that people who pray like that are mistaken about the nature of god and his relationship with the world, and that if they believe that their prayers have been answered then they're just wrong?

Theo: Well, I should have phrased it differently, but essentially I agree.

Anna: You see, what I find so puzzling is that although you say that some people who believe that their prayers have been answered are mistaken, you also say that some aren't. How can you tell which is which? I mean, assuming that both sets

of people are sincere in their beliefs, and honest in saying that they prayed as they did, and in both cases what was prayed for actually happened, then are you just saying that in one set of cases what they prayed for would have happened anyway, and so actually god had nothing to do with it?

Theo: Ah, now you are making an unwarranted assumption there, Anna. You assume that, in order for us to say that god has answered a prayer – say, for the recovery of a loved one – it must be the case that the event in question would not have happened anyway. Yet we surely do not apply such a strict criterion in our everyday affairs. Imagine, for example, that I call the waiter over for another coffee, intending to buy one for you too, and you ask me to buy you one; now, it is certainly the case that I should have bought you the coffee even if you had not asked me to, but that does not mean that I have ignored your request. On the contrary, I think that we should most naturally say that I have granted your request.

Mel: I'm sorry, Dr Sevvis, but I'm a bit confused. Are you saying that whenever one person's action matches another person's request, the former is granting the request of the latter? That can't be right, can it?

Theo: No, it certainly can not. In my coffee example, what I did was because of Anna's request, though not only because of it. If I had not already intended to

buy her a coffee, her request would have been adequate reason for me to do so. On the other hand, if I had planned to buy her a coffee because I wanted a favour from her, and if I should not have bought it otherwise, *even if she had asked me to*, then my buying her the coffee would not count as granting her request.



Mel: Hmm... I think I understand, but it doesn't sound right to me.

Anna: Yes, it's fascinating but a bit complicated. Let me get it straight. Take the example of a mother praying that her son Michael's life will be saved. OK, first the easy bit: if god saves Michael's life and wouldn't have done so unless it had been prayed for, then we can say that he's answered the mother's prayer – I think that we'd all go along with that.

(Everyone nods agreement.)

Secondly, the difficult bit: god saves Michael's life, but he would have done that even if it hadn't been prayed for. Now Theo, you say that there are two possibilities: we have to ask what god would have done if he hadn't had his own reasons for saving the life. Would he have answered the mother's prayer or wouldn't

he? If the answer's yes, we can say that he did in fact answer her prayer; if it's no, we can't.

Theo: Well, I am not sure that you have made it less complicated, but that is certainly what I want to say.

Anna: To be honest, Theo, I don't think that it *can* be made less complicated... and that's one reason that I have my doubts that it's – what did you call it? – the way we think in everyday life.

Mel: There's another problem anyway, I think. The example of Dr Sevis treating Anna to a coffee is very different from religious prayer – after all, god's supposed to be essentially omniscient and benevolent. If god was going to save a life, how can we talk about the possibility that he didn't have reasons to do it? The only way that that could make sense is if either the situation or god were different. If the *situation* were different, then we're not talking about whether god did answer the mother's prayer, only whether he would have done in other circumstances. And how could *god* be different?

Anna: Good point Mel – and it brings us back to the problem of evil.¹

Theo: Well, before we tackle evil again, Anna, might I try to answer Mel? I think that the problem is, Mel, that you are treating god and the world simply as two interacting individuals (and I suppose that I am partly to blame for that, with my example of buying Anna a coffee). Remember that god *created* the world. He created the natural order of cause and effect, and that includes human beings and their prayers.

Mel: I'm not sure... *was* I doing that? I don't really see how that deals with my problem.

Theo: You see, when the mother prays for her son's life, she is not trying to get god to do something that he would not have done anyway – she is actually taking part in a chain of causes and effects that god created in order to achieve a state of affairs that included Michael's recovery. In fact, as I should have realised earlier, it is also clear that this account of prayer rules out the need for what I was saying earlier about whether or not god would have acted anyway.

Anna: Hmm... I must admit that it's not completely clear to me yet, Theo. Look, do you mean that we don't have free will – that all our actions, including our

prayers, are simply part of a completely pre-determined series of causes and effects? If so, then I see that there's no need to worry about what god would have done if we hadn't prayed to him.

Theo: No. As you must be aware, Anna, I am committed to the view that god has granted us free will.

Anna: That's what I thought. But then I'm not sure what's going on in your account of prayer. If the mother's decision was freely made, then she might have decided not to pray for her son's life – so we're back with the question of whether or not god would have acted if she hadn't prayed to him.

Mel: I know this isn't really a philosophical question so much as a theological one – but I don't understand *why* god would have made prayer part of the causal order anyway.

Anna: No, I think that that's philosophically relevant, Mel – and again it links in with the problem of evil. So, Theo, given that your god is perfect, omniscient, and so on, why did he include petitionary prayer in the causal structure of the world?



Theo: Perhaps I expressed myself badly; of course we and our prayers are part of the causal order created by god, but god is not himself part of that order. As I said before, our prayers have no *causal* power – they are not magic spells. God chooses to respond to the world in certain ways, and our prayers are part of the world to which he responds.

Anna: Fair enough, but that doesn't answer Mel's question. Look, perhaps you want to say that the existence and rôle of petitionary prayer makes the world a better place, and that's why god included it in his creation. Is that it?

Theo: Well of course – but *anything* that god included in his creation makes it a better place, whether we understand that or not.

Anna: OK. I must admit that I'm still not satisfied, if only because I *don't* understand how petitionary prayer makes the world a better place, and I dislike the retreat to 'god moves in a mysterious way'. Still, rather than getting sidetracked, are you all happy if we accept for the sake of argument that god has *some* good reason for making prayer part of the world?

(They all signify agreement, Theo with the air of someone who would really like to say more.)

Right – now, what do we have so far? Theo's picture is of a god who creates a world that contains beings with free will; these beings sometimes pray to the god, asking for various favours for themselves or

others, and sometimes what they pray for comes about. Sometimes the god chooses to answer those prayers, and sometimes not. Of course, if they're prayers for what would be evil, then the god doesn't answer them. But what if they're prayers for what would be good?

Theo: You imply that there is a problem here, but I do not see it. If the prayers are for what is good, then god answers them. Of course, we cannot always tell what is good and what is not, but god can tell, and god decides.

Anna: But that's the problem; if we pray for what's good – genuinely good – then wouldn't god have done it anyway?

(Theo opens his mouth to comment, but Anna cuts him off.)

Yes, I know Theo – your claim is that god would be answering your prayer for something even if he was going to do it anyway. My problem with that isn't just that it makes for a very complicated story, and so isn't very convincing as an account of how we think in everyday life; it's also that you seem to take the notion of *answering* and turn it into something much weaker than what we started with – too weak to support your position, in fact.

Mel: Would it help to think about answering a question instead of a prayer or a request? Imagine that for some reason I'm about to remind Anna of the time, Dr Sevis, and just before I speak you ask me for the time. What I say is

certainly an answer to your question, but I didn't answer you. Is that what's going on with prayer? If god had been going to save the little boy's life anyway, then what he did was an answer to the mother's prayer, but he didn't answer her.

Theo: Ingenious, Mel, but unfortunately not really acceptable. You see, that would simply place god at the level of the natural world; he would be said to answer our prayers only in the sense that the coming of rain answers the prayers of the drought ridden, or the illness of a teacher answers the prayers of a schoolboy who has neglected his homework. The difference must be that god answers us in a personal sense.

I confess, Anna, that I am unsure how to answer you. Perhaps I might be allowed to leave this issue for the moment – until I have had an opportunity to think about it – and instead try a very different argument.

(Anna signals agreement.)

Theo: Well, think for a moment of the Lord's Prayer, which I think most Christian denominations share in much the same form. It contains such lines as: 'thy will be done, thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'... Now, perhaps we should think of all prayer in this way, as signalling our acceptance of god's will. After all, in saying that prayer, we are not asking god to do as we ask, are we?

Anna: Maybe not, but then haven't you lost the petitionary part? If I say to you: 'Do what you want, Theo!' I'm not petitioning you, not asking you to do anything. Besides, it's just not true that that's what most people are doing when they pray; when the mother asks god to save Michael's life, she's not simply telling god that he should do whatever he wants – oh, and by the way it'd be nice if he wanted to save her son.

Theo: I suppose that you are right, though it sometimes seems to me that people *ought* to be praying in that way. I sympathise with my friend from the seminary: the idea that god can be petitioned does have a superstitious ring to it, with which I feel less than comfortable.

Perhaps I could say this: when we pray, we are not simply saying to god that his will shall be done, but declaring our trust, our faith in him. And it is also possible that we do this, in part at least, in order to put ourselves into a certain state of mind.

Anna: I'm not sure what you mean, Theo.

Theo: Well, by praying, I might be attempting to correct in myself my tendency to want things to revolve around me; that is, the act of prayer might be an attempt to induce in myself a different state of mind – one of submission to god's will.

Anna: Well, perhaps – but, first, that's still not what most believers actually mean to do when they pray, so you're offering a prescription rather than a description.

Mel: You mean that Dr Sevvis is trying to *change* his religion rather than *explain* it?

Theo: That is not fair, I think. My suggestion is more that, while believers once thought in terms of petitioning god, modern believers are more sophisticated in their understanding of the relationship between god and his creation. The form of our prayers has remained the same, more or less, but we no longer take that form literally.

Anna: But then aren't you saying that modern prayer is at best metaphorical (and at worst self-deceptive)? After all, you seem to hold that god doesn't alter his behaviour on request, so prayers that involve requests can't be taken at all literally. It's as if someone puts pancakes out on her roof every

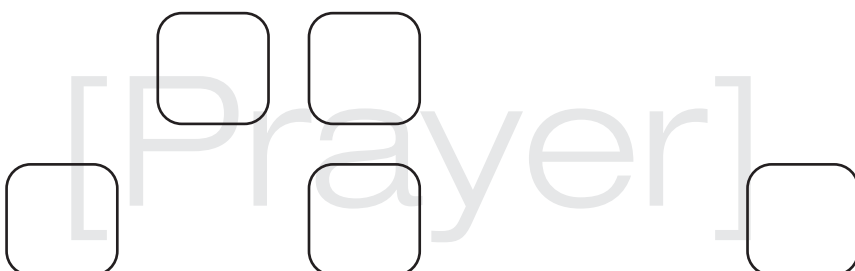
Epiphany eve, but says that she doesn't really believe in *kallikantzari*² – that leaving the cakes is just an action designed to make her feel safe and secure. Even if we believe her, we surely have to ask why putting out cakes should make her feel safe if she doesn't believe in *kallikantzari*. Either she's deceiving herself, and she does believe, deep down – or her feeling of safety is produced simply because she's followed a familiar custom. And if it's the latter, then the effect has nothing to do with *kallikantzari* at all.

So, Theo – are your apparently petitionary prayers based on your belief that god might answer them, or are they no more than a habit whose psychological effects you value?

Theo: The latter, in part – but more than that. After all, even though I take the petition aspect metaphorically, I still hold that prayer involves communication from me to god.

Anna: But one-way communication?

Theo: No, not necessarily. Even if I accept what appear to be petitions are in fact something else, so that there is no *answer* in the normal sense, I do not have to surrender the notion that god responds in some sense.



William P Kiblinger

Understanding the Athenian

[Fear of Socrates:]

A Reading of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*

Who was Socrates? Was he a sincere student or a sincere skeptic? Or was he sly and disingenuous? Or perhaps he was none of these, but more of a religious saint. Whatever the answer (if such a thing is finally possible), one thing is for sure: one must assess Socrates' use of irony and how it complicates his skepticism. Does he merely pretend not to know while in fact holding the position of an ethical cognitivist? Or are his claims of doubt genuine? In the end, one must judge just what Socrates was attempting to do with his life: as he himself asks, what exactly was his *pragma*? [task - Ed] The answer to this question could potentially explain why the Athenians feared him and his way of life.

In this essay, I argue that Socrates' skepticism is genuine and not the disingenuous product of irony. I claim that this skepticism, therefore, presents a real threat to Athenian traditions and indeed to all unreflective ways of life. This genuine skepticism consequently renders inapplicable the modern notion of ethical cognitivism as a description of Socrates' position (though noncognitivism also misses the mark). In the end, Socrates' peculiar mix of traditional religious thought with ethical skepticism makes him the scapegoat for a society with a deep-seated anxiety that derives from two conflicting needs: (i) the need to participate within a tradition whose idealized form depicts a permanent destiny for the state, and (ii) the need

to establish individual identity through the dynamic creation of norms as expressions of human freedom.

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To begin with, let's take the advice of Proclus and the subsequent recommendation of Myles Burnyeat¹ and consider the first words of the *Apology of Socrates* in order to meditate on their significance for the whole dialogue. I wager that this exercise will dispel many of the uncharitable interpretations of Socrates' speech by those who find reason from the *prooimion* (introduction) to cast aspersions upon him. In the first sentence, we find the words *ouk oida* ('I do not know'), and this mild disclaimer at the outset will turn out to be the linchpin of Socrates' whole argument, indeed of his whole life's work.

Critics frequently charge Socrates with irony, by which they mean *eironeia*, i.e., dissimulation, false pretence, or plain lying. This charge seems obvious to James Redfield presumably because of the apparent flagrancy of Socrates' lies. Thus, Redfield writes, 'When [Socrates] says he is not 'powerful' (*deinos*), he is, of course, lying; this is one of the most powerful and skillfully organized and orchestrated speeches ever composed.'² R. E. Allen makes the same point by calling attention to the vast disparity between Socrates' professed inability to speak eloquently and his actual display of rhetorical

mastery.

Now there is no doubt about Socrates' skill in speaking. His brilliance depends on his deft ability to respond to unforeseen positions held by his interlocutors and to transform those opinions gradually through his elenctic method. Arguing by *elenchos* requires scrupulous attention to the statements of the other and precise rejoinders in crisp language. Naturally, Socrates is a skillful speaker. But is he a clever (*deinos*) speaker? In this *prooimion*, Socrates is at pains to distinguish himself and his philosophical identity from the sophists and their reputation for rhetorical cleverness. As C. Reeve³ rightly points out, Socrates frequently denounces 'clever speakers' and attempts to differentiate himself from this group, but he never denies being a good, skillful, and even masterful speaker. He can do so without contradiction or dissimulation because, as Brickhouse and Smith⁴ note, he is invoking a special sense of 'clever,' which refers specifically to the sophists who were well known for 'making the weaker argument seem stronger.' Socrates is not that sort of clever speaker for the simple reason that he tells the truth—or, at least, he reports his mental states truthfully.

One must distinguish truth from truthfulness. Socrates may possess true belief through divine dispensation, but he denies having any knowledge of the truth. That is, he denies having any *moral* knowledge

that he has derived solely from human reason. Presumably, he possesses knowledge of ordinary facts, but this is not his concern when speaking of truth. It is moral knowledge that matters, and he denies any possession of it. Thus, he can only speak in good faith or bad. Like the 'clever' sophists, he can feign to know when he does not and speak cleverly when he should not, or he can openly admit that he does not know. The task of the jury, and ours as well, is to decide whether Socrates speaks truthfully.

Thus, the key to the defense is to prove that Socrates speaks truthfully, so that his honesty will differentiate his words from the clever speech of the sophists who feign to know. How then can we be certain that Socrates speaks truthfully? What evidence can we rely on to guarantee that he is sincerely reporting his mental contents? The first words give us the clue. The rest of the *Apology* explains the point. Socrates begins his entire defense by confessing, 'I do not know.' This confession becomes not only the centerpiece of his case in court but in fact, as we learn from his devotion to Apollo, the guiding principle of his entire life. If we can judge truthfulness only by the correspondence of one's words with one's actions, then we must decide whether Socrates did in fact live the life of one who neither knows nor bears the pretence of knowing. The entire defense rests on its ability to convince the jury (and us, the reading jury) that Socrates did live such a life. If he succeeds in this endeavor, then we cannot judge him to be lying when he distinguishes himself from all those 'clever' charlatans who feign knowledge.

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If Socrates is not a clever charlatan, then indeed, Socrates, we do ask (as he

rhetorically puts it in his own defense): 'Who is Socrates, and what does he do?' (*Apology*, 20c4-5). We ask this question over and over again, so much so that plausible justifications can be given for vastly different views. It seems that a hermeneutical dilemma occurs in which the reader inevitably becomes implicated in the reading. The meaning 'behind' the text does not appear without a layering of meaning 'in front of' the text. Certainly, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche allow their own views to radiate through the surface of their readings of Socrates but not in ways that are obviously inappropriate—assuming of course that one has abandoned the hope of ever retrieving the 'real' Socrates. Such a hope must be abandoned, as with all hopes based on confusion. So our question must not simply be about the '*pragma*' (work, task, business) of Socrates, but the *pragma* of Socrates *for us*.

Sarah Kofman suggests that the variance among readings of Socrates depends on numerous prior interpretive choices, the presupposition of which reflects a desire (if unconscious) to guard the reader's certitudes from the destructive sweep of this 'atypical and atypical monster,' as Kofman puts it.⁵ For example, one must choose which source to privilege among the three possibilities: Plato, Xenophon, or Aristophanes. One must also decide whether or not to read Socrates as ironic: if so, tragic or comic; if not, optimistic or pessimistic. Likewise, Socrates' ignorance must be evaluated as feigned or real, which will affect the way one conceives his method. And what of his *daimonion* [inner self - Ed] and its voice? It could speak for the Absolute Subjectivity of Geist, or it could be the dying gasps of a degenerate instinct as rationality



gradually comes to prevail through the elenchos. How should we treat Socrates' place in history? In turning philosophy away from quasi-scientific investigations of nature toward human affairs and the care of the soul, does Socrates mark a decisive beginning, a turning point, or a failure and an ending? What of his political views? Is he, as Karl Popper suggests, a lover of freedom, a democrat and a humanitarian, who was betrayed by Plato's depiction of him as a totalitarian? Or conceivably he was truly anti-democratic, and thus his condemnation of Athens includes its constitution as well as its citizens. Perhaps, like W. K. C. Guthrie, we would prefer to carve out a view somewhere in the middle.⁶ At the end of Kofman's account of these twisted readings of Socrates, she poses the following question: 'If the problem of Socrates has caused so much ink to flow, in the final analysis, is it not because behind the 'case' of this atypical and atypical monster, each interpreter is trying as he can to 'settle' his own 'case,' to carry out his reading in such a way that all of his own certitudes will not collapse with Socrates, that his own equilibrium and that of his 'system'—even if there is nothing obviously systematic about it—will not be too seriously threatened?'⁷

Yes. Readings of Socrates always reflect a defense mechanism of one

sort or another in order to shield the reader from the threat of Socrates' skeptical scrutiny. So let me conclude this point by confessing my 'case' for a moment. As Brickhouse and Smith⁸ contend, Socrates' 'pragma' involves destructive, constructive, and hortative elements, but it is the destructive moment that is the most enticing and yet most threatening. Let me explain. I agree with Gregory Vlastos that Socrates' 'royal art,' which aims at the perfection of the soul, is intended (*contra* Xenophon) to be a universal calling for all rational individuals who care to examine themselves. (I am not sure, however, whether Vlastos's notion of Socrates as 'searcher'¹⁰ can fully account for his constructive side or his 'suffering' on behalf of the Athenians, but that is another story involving a further reading, which cannot delay us here.) I also agree with Brickhouse and Smith that the elenchos is not a craft but has universal applicability. This universality has two senses: the elenchos can be used by anyone, and it can be applied to any belief. Furthermore, Brickhouse and Smith make an important point in asserting that Socrates examines more than the consistency of a set of propositions or a set of beliefs, but rather a way of life. What then is so enticing and threatening about Socrates' destructive moment of skepticism? It promises to change anyone's life including my own, but my frail, neurotic 'system' may collapse in the process.

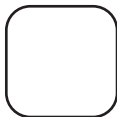
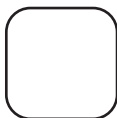
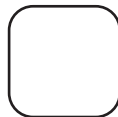


Thus far, the depiction of Socrates may strike some readers of the Platonic dialogues as out of step with the central thrust of this extraordinary philosopher. Surely, some readers would argue, Socrates only threatens beliefs and even ways of life insofar as he possesses a rational method for arriving at universal and necessary ethical truth. The truth is indeed threatening to those who are attached to falsehoods, but it is also a source of hope since Socrates promises direct access to it.

My question for this section is the following: Is Socrates an ethical cognitivist? Does he provide a method for achieving this direct access to moral truth? The question admits of differing responses depending at least on the following: (i) who one takes the literary figure 'Socrates' to be, and (ii) the status of Socrates' *daimonion*. Vlastos argues that Socrates does not intend to deceive through his use of irony (*eironeia*), but that this literary figure employs the trope of irony to serve his maieutic

goal. Thus, Vlastos contends that Socrates avoids literal language because of the nature of learning: 'if you are to come to the truth,' Vlastos writes, 'it must be by yourself for yourself.'¹¹ Then, we may ask, to what degree of irony does Socrates invoke his *daimonion*? The nature of this divine voice within him has to be explained in order to decide our question, because his 'serious' submission to this voice seems to present a *prima facie* reason to deny that Socrates is an ethical cognitivist. That is, if he is truly heeding the instruction of this heteronomous authority, then Socrates does not come to ethical truth by himself or solely for himself. I assert that Vlastos's interpretation of Socrates' irony and the view of Socrates as a religious devotee whose fate as a tragic hero verges on sainthood suggest two things: (i) that Socrates truthfully reports the proscriptions of his *daimonion*, and thus (ii) that his reliance on this voice in ethical matters reflects a noncognitivist ethical position.

First of all, the literary figure of 'Socrates' can be understood in many ways, but from among the literary options for assessing the status of this character allow me to select the tragic view of Socrates.¹² In this view, Plato, as a tragedian superior to all other tragedians, develops the literary figure of Socrates as a tragic hero whose plight is to suffer the slings and arrows of a populace that fails to honor or understand his religious mission. Here, I disagree with Kenneth Seeskin



[Socrates]

who contrasts Socrates to Oedipus by saying: 'Oedipus suffered greatly.... Whatever else Socrates does in the dialogues, he does not suffer.' True, Socrates sleeps like a baby in his prison cell while his friend Crito frets anxiously, but that scene occurs near the conclusion of Socrates' long and arduous journey in service of Apollo, at the end of which he might have said, 'My feet are tired, but my soul is rested.' Seeskin, however, does recognize the heroic nature of Socrates' tragic demise, and he correctly notes the religious aspect of Socrates' dedication to the pursuit of philosophy. Socrates could well be viewed in this light as the patron saint of the religious practice called 'moral philosophy.'

Given this hagiographic image of Socrates, the next point to examine is the specific role of his *daimonion* in the dialogues. Does Socrates really mean he hears a divine voice that holds him in check when he is on the verge of transgression? Through Vlastos's interpretation of Socratic irony and Seeskin's hagiographic depiction of the philosophizing zealot, it is not difficult to accept the possibility that Socrates truthfully describes his mental states when he refers to this divine voice. Once we have granted this possibility, Socrates' ethical cognitivism (as many philosophers view it) deserves critical scrutiny, because he relies, at least in part, on ethical assertions whose validity cannot be argued for or against. The *daimonion* functions as a sheer existential decision or emotivist intuition, and Socrates' insistent disavowal of moral knowledge denies him any metaphysical system within which such assertions could be rationally described and justified. Thus, this interpretation of Socrates renders him an ethical noncognitivist.

Some qualification, however, deserves mention. First, the *daimonion* only proscribes, never prescribes. Thus, a positive principle of moral action, e.g., the virtue of benevolence, could be developed in conjunction with the noncognitivist element. Secondly, the relation of faith and reason differed significantly in the ancient world from the modern view such that the very notion of cognitivism in that context would not have precluded religious revelation. Indeed, epistemology at that time was grounded on the twin pillars of sense-perception and religious inspiration, which together comprised the totality of reason. Perhaps, then, our initial question about cognitivism is simply anachronistic.

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If cognitivism and noncognitivism are not appropriate distinctions to make within the context of 5th century Athens, then, arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, Socrates does not represent a complete shift in ethics from an authoritarian religious basis to an autonomous form of thought based on an individual's reason. To be sure, there is some truth in that description, but the whole truth is more complicated. In this section, I would like to explore one way of accounting for the threatening shift that Socrates does represent without resorting to anachronistic terms like cognitivism.

In this vein, there are two aporiai arising from Socrates' ethical position that I would like to consider briefly. First, Socrates claims, on the one hand, that 'the bad harm those who are always nearest them' (*Apology* 25d8-10), while, on the other, he contends that Meletus and Anytus, who are morally reprehensible, cannot do him any harm because 'it is not allowed by the law of God for a better man to be

harmed by a worse man' (30c8-d1). Unless Socrates intends to equivocate on the sense of harm in these passages, an aporia [objections] ensues and requires further explanation. Secondly, Socrates' rejection of retaliation (e.g., *Crito* 49c-d), if taken as a universal principle for settling disputes, seems to stand in stark contrast to the typically Homeric code of ethics, which Socrates himself invokes when proudly recollecting his own military feats. In this case, his actions seem *prima facie* to contradict his stated beliefs, and this leads us to the second aporia. In the first case, the aporia seems to be internal to the concept of harm and thus to involve a logical contradiction. In the second case, the aporia arises because his actions appear to be at odds with his principle for action and therefore seem to involve a performative contradiction. I propose to solve these aporiai by asserting that Socrates' ethical position stands out from its contemporary context as radically different insofar as many fundamental ethical concepts (e.g., harm) take on new meanings in his thought, but his position, nevertheless, retains vestiges of the Homeric code and fails to universalize its principles completely.

In the first case, Socrates uses the concept 'harm' in the traditional sense when claiming that the evil person tends to harm those in close proximity, but he shifts the concept of harm to a radically different moral sense when asserting the principle that the worse man can never harm the better man (N.B., the terms 'worse' and 'better' have shifted in equivalent ways as well). When Socrates speaks of the traditional sort of harm, he means any sort of non-moral activity that may diminish one's happiness (e.g., physical harm, loss of wealth or honor, etc.). He accepts this definition for the sake of the elenchos because his opponent,

Meletus, would likely subscribe to such a belief and could be refuted through its use. Later, however, when he speaks of his own beliefs, no longer in the elenchos, he explains that 'harm' has a moral sense which by far outweighs its non-moral meaning. In this case, harm refers to any activity that diminishes one's virtue and adversely affects one's soul. Let's call this 'moral harm.' In his radically new moral principle, Socrates contends that no non-moral harm can do moral harm to a person. In this way, Socrates avoids logical contradiction by intentionally employing an equivocation of the term 'harm' (non-moral versus moral) in order to establish a radically new ethical code.¹⁴

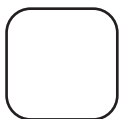
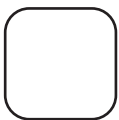
As for Socrates' apparent performative contradiction, the crucial factor involved in this aporia is the moral scope of his ethical position. To his credit, Socrates initiates a shift toward universal moral norms by rejecting the culturally circumscribed norms of the Homeric moral code, but his cosmopolitanism does not extend to all social inferiors such as women, aliens, and slaves.¹⁵ In the Homeric code, moral obligation is never universal but always specific, i.e., based on social status and contingent circumstance. Socrates indeed extends moral obligation to non-Greek guests but not to all foreigners. Thus, the apparent performative contradiction is resolved by the fact that Socrates' ethical position does not have a truly universal moral scope though it is considerably wider than its Homeric predecessor. History must wait for many centuries before the truly deontological principles of Immanuel Kant are to arrive (though perhaps the relativism of Protagoras or the agapic message of Jesus—spread to the ends of the earth, as Luke writes—makes an earlier approximation of moral universalism).

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Taking stock of where we have been so far, we have seen that we should take seriously Socrates' confession not to know the truth and his deference to the *daimonion* in matters of ethics

rather than dismissing these claims as dissimulating irony. Furthermore, we have seen that his *pragma* of skeptical questioning potentially threatens everything we stand for and do. This threat, moreover, may be a threat to traditional religion and to tradition more generally, but it issues from within religion in such way that the modern distinction between cognitivism and noncognitivism does not apply. In particular, Socrates threatens to transform traditional codes of conduct by reformulating concepts such as 'harm,' shedding some Homeric layers of meaning while retaining vestiges of them. Thus, Socrates' *pragma*, his life's work, appears to be dangerous to the Athenian way of life, and consequently their fear of him led to his trial, sentencing, and execution.

Our final question, then, is the following: Were the Athenian fears of Socrates justified? An adequate response to this question would involve the well-established distinction between fear and anxiety. Fear always relates to a particular object, whereas anxiety is perpetually indeterminate and free-floating. Insofar as Socrates becomes the object of the Athenian fears, we can ask whether his words and deeds merit his identification with this objective fear. For some scholars such as Vlastos,¹⁶ Socrates' moralistic conception of the gods reflects the erosion of traditional religious belief initiated by the 'nature-philosophers' of Ionia and pursued further by the Eleatics (beginning as much as 150 years before with Xenophanes' critique of



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polytheism and theological anthropomorphism). Continuing this line of thought, Socrates effects an 'ethical transformation' of religious understanding, which is 'tantamount to the destruction of the old gods.'¹⁷ Thus, the Athenian fear (a 'manifesto of orthodoxy,' as J. B. Bury¹⁸ describes it) was justified. However, when Socrates asks Euthyphro incredulously whether he really believes the gods quarrel and are in enmity (i.e., whether they act immorally), Euthyphro replies affirmatively but reports that whenever he speaks 'about matters of religion . . . they [the Athenian Assembly] laugh at me as if I were a madman' (*Euthyphro* 3c1-3). Since the tides already seemed to be turning against traditional religion among the general populace, other scholars such as Brickhouse and Smith argue that Socrates was not identified as the object of Athenian fears on account of his moral transformation of the gods because Socrates was simply not so revolutionary in this respect. Thus, the assertion that the Athenians identified Socrates as the object of their fears because of his unorthodox religious beliefs seems historically inaccurate since such apparently heterodox beliefs were in fact fairly ordinary. The Athenian fears, then, must have been more complicated and ambivalent, and they therefore require further explanation.

Complicated and ambivalent fears are fears whose particular object cannot fully determine their scope and power. In such cases, the fears are mere signs of a much greater anxiety, which in this case involves the interplay of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Despite W. H. Auden's proclamation that the twentieth century inaugurated the age of anxiety, 5th century B.C.E. Athens seems to have experienced its own form of this epidemic. Shortly after the highly romanticized portrayal of

Athens in Pericles' Funeral Speech, Athens struggled with the interplay of conflicting value systems (roughly, as A. W. Adkins²⁰ reports, competitive versus cooperative), and this conflict reflects the ever-present anxieties arising from the relations of identity and difference, individualism and participation, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny. Adkins's analysis of the term *nomos*²¹ illustrates these anxieties insofar as its meaning spans 'custom' and 'law': in the case of custom, the term relates to the need for participation within a tradition whose idealized form depicts a permanent destiny for the state; in the case of law, the term invokes a drive towards individual identity through the dynamic creation of norms as expressions of human freedom. In the aftermath of Pericles, the Athenians cannot simply repeat the past without compromising their future, nor can they simply press forward without forfeiting the past. When the notion of *nomoi* is thoroughly ambiguous, the question of justification according to the customs/laws has no unambiguous solution. Similarly, when the object of fear dissolves into the amorphous flow of anxiety, the evolution of a fear becomes the reification of anxiety in a sign. The question of justification, then, entails the recovery of the object that the sign represents, but if the content of a sign is precisely not an object then no object can be recovered. Thus, the fear cannot be so justified. In other words, Socrates becomes the objectified scapegoat of a collective anxiety, his condemnation functions as a free-floating sign with no objective referent, and thus its justification cannot be assessed.

Notes

- 1 Myles Burnyeat, 'First Words,' Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society, 1997, v. 43: 1-20.
- 2 See the Note on the Translation in James Redfield's *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, p. 35.
- 3 C. Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology: An Essay on Plato's Apology of Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 5-6.
- 4 Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 54.
- 5 Sarah Kofman, *Socrates: Fictions of a Philosopher*, tr. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 6 'These two polar opposites may serve to indicate the twisting and turning to which the evidence can be subjected.' W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 95.
- 7 Kofman, pp. 247-8.
- 8 Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 3-29.
- 9 Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 102-3.
- 10 See Gregory Vlastos, 'The Paradox of Socrates' in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, ed. Daniel W. Graham (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- 11 Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 44.

12 I follow Alister Cameron on this view. See his *Plato's Affair with Tragedy* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1978).

13 Kenneth Seeskin, *Dialogue and Discovery: A Study in Socratic Method* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 73-95.

14 This ethical view, however, does not entail the Identity Thesis, as Vlastos calls it, which simply equates virtue and happiness (or, more precisely, asserts that virtue is the only constituent of happiness). Indeed, Vlastos persuasively offers a 'multicomponent model of happiness' whereby Socrates can prefer to avoid non-moral harm while denying its adverse effects on the soul. For example, in the *Gorgias*, Polus asks if Socrates would wish to suffer injustice rather than do it, and Socrates replies: 'For my part I would wish neither. But if I were forced to choose between suffering injustice and doing it, I would choose to suffer it' (*Gorg.* 469b12-c2). (See Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 227.) With this multicomponent model of happiness in mind, Vlastos's position can be reconciled with that of Brickhouse and Smith which asserts that virtue for Socrates is not necessary for happiness because virtue is viewed as only one of many constituents

of happiness. Their positions differ, however, with respect to the sufficiency thesis which Brickhouse and Smith also deny, thereby denying that virtue is constitutive of happiness at all, but that is another story. (See Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, pp. 103-36, esp. p. 118.) In any case, the notion of harm has entered the moral realm through Socrates' ethical inquiry and can no longer simply apply to matters unrelated to the well-being (eudaimonia) of one's soul.

15 Socrates, *Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, p. 179.

16 *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

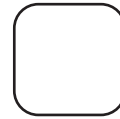
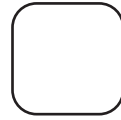
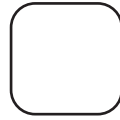
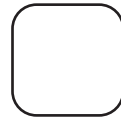
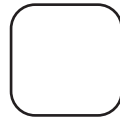
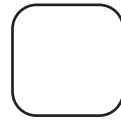
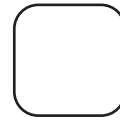
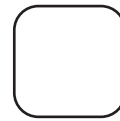
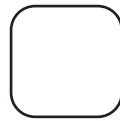
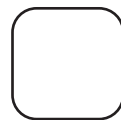
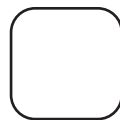
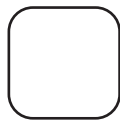
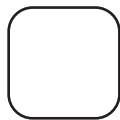
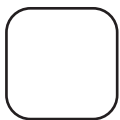
17 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

18 J. B. Bury, 'Socrates Not Unjustly Condemned; The Socratic Problem', ed. M. Montuori (*Amsterdam: Gieben*, 1992), p. 222-3.

19 *Plato's Socrates*, pp. 181-3.

20 A. W. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century* (New York: Norton and Company, Inc., 1972).

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.



[Socrates]

Paul Sheehy

[Moral Facts]

I Introduction – Meta-ethics

One part of the study and practice of moral philosophy or ethics¹ belongs to normative ethics. This is concerned with theories and approaches which articulate judgements on how we ought to act or on how we should be. The central concern of normative ethics is an elucidation of what is right, good or virtuous. In the present article we shall turn our attention to meta-ethics. This is the branch of philosophy which aims to understand the nature of moral judgements. Rather than asking what kinds of action are good or right, the question becomes what is it to say of an action that it is good or right? We are not seeking a substantive ethical theory about what is right, but enquiring into what we mean when we say that an action or person or state of affairs is good or right, wrong, bad, cruel, just and so on. There is a concern with the analysis of moral concepts, the relations between them and other (non-moral) concepts and the logic of their use. Perhaps, above all though, are the questions of whether our moral statements are capable of being true or false and of whether we can possess moral knowledge.

II Realism and moral realism

The term 'realism' is used widely and in different contexts. Realism can be characterised as a set of theses about the world and our relationship to it. Understood thus it is conjunction of metaphysical, epistemological and semantic views.² While there is no settled, neat consensus on the details of the commitments of realism, the following captures those views which stake out a realist stance. The world is mind independent with a structure accounting for its fundamental nature; a structure which does not depend upon what we think about it or the concepts we deploy to describe it. The facts about the world are objective. The fundamental metaphysical claim of the realist about *x* is that *x* exists independently of whether it is thought or talked about. Knowledge of the world is possible and we do actually have some knowledge of the world. Language refers to the objects in the world.³ The meaning of a sentence is fixed by its truth conditions, and those conditions are evidence transcendent (semantic realism).

At the risk of compressing a range of claims moral realism is the view that when we make moral judgements we are making claims – uttering sentences – that are capable of being literally true or false; some of which are true; and about which we can

make genuine errors. Furthermore, they are true (or false) by virtue of an independently existing moral reality about which we can and do possess knowledge. The realist must ultimately explain the sense in which there is an independent moral reality, but the core of the position is that there are moral *facts*. The realist position is thus opposed to those meta-ethical theories which view our moral statements as expressions of attitude or emotion or as aiming to assert facts, but which all turn out to be false because there are no moral facts to express. To put matters crudely the realist holds that our moral beliefs and judgements are about a special class of facts – the moral facts – and it is these facts which underpin the truth of our moral beliefs. The anti-realist ultimately offers an analysis of the nature and meaning of our moral judgements in terms of our attitudes, emotions and opinions, which are typically shaped by the prevailing conventions of our society.

A full-blown moral realism has then these commitments:⁴

- There exist moral facts and they are distinct class of facts.
- We possess moral knowledge, which is to have knowledge of (some of) the moral facts.
- Realists hold that moral facts are objective, or independent of any beliefs or thoughts we might have about them. What is right is not determined by what I or anybody

else thinks is right. It is not even determined by what we all think is right, even if we could be got to agree. To take an example from Jonathan Dancy,⁵ we cannot make actions right by agreeing that they are, any more than we can make bombs safe by agreeing that they are.

- It is possible for us to make mistakes about what is right and what is wrong. So what people conscientiously decide they should do may not be the same as what they should do.

The basic question is whether realism represents our best understanding of moral discourse and the ways in which moral judgements relate to the domain of human interaction and the natural world. In order to understand the motivation for endorsing realism and the plausibility of doing so a series of related questions must be considered.

In the present paper I shall focus on the question that perhaps arises immediately and most obviously. What kind of fact is a moral fact? While I shall not here address the further and related issues, a fully worked out realist answer must ensure that it can accommodate an explanation of:

- (i) the epistemology of moral realism - what account can be provided of how we acquire moral knowledge?
- (ii) the relationship between moral judgement and motivation - what is the role of moral judgement in our moral psychology? After all, we ordinarily think that judging something to be, say, wrong plays a role in our coming to have a motivation to act.⁶

III Why realism?

The realist can point out that taking our moral statements as aiming to report the facts and sometimes succeeding in doing so conforms with the appearance of our moral talk and experience. A moral judgement takes propositional form. I believe, judge, say, hold that something is right or wrong. If we take the surface form of our talk seriously then there is an immediate appeal to realism. For the form of our moral talk looks to be explained in terms of its role in stating the moral facts. When I explain to my colleagues in the sociology department that we should discourage bored teenagers from casually burning dogs during the summer vacation I do not appeal to the damaging effects of dog-burning on suburban culture. Nor do I justify my assertion by pointing out that it is a commitment which sincerely expresses my strongly held attitude about the way to treat beasts. Rather, people should not burn dogs because it is wrong to do so: it is a fact

about the kind of world we inhabit that the wanton destruction of life and value is a bad, wrong or vicious act.



Now, of course my interlocutor might dispute the claim that some practice is wrong, state of affairs morally bad or disposition of character vicious. In our moral judgements and discourse we are ordinarily concerned that we get the answers to moral questions right. It matters that my judgement is true that my friend has acted in a morally deplorable way by cuckolding his brother. For to hold someone blame or praiseworthy and to conduct oneself accordingly with respect to them is a weighty matter. It is not an issue confined to the study or classroom, but a question of how one engages with others. The justification, explanation and perhaps motivation

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for the way I interact and treat others in light of their deeds and attitudes is how they are morally. The how-they-are is not a matter of mere opinion or feeling, but of the moral facts. The explanation and justification of the criticism of my friend is that it is literally true that it is wrong (other things being equal) to sleep with your brother's wife.

These considerations point to a closely related and common feature of our moral talk: disagreement. If we genuinely disagree whether some action is right then this appears to suppose that there is a domain of moral facts about which we can form beliefs and about which we can be mistaken. When I dispute the moral acceptability of abortion with a colleague it does not seem that either of us takes the discussion to be an idle one in the sense that there is no answer to be had. Each of us begins by believing that he has a better understanding of the facts and seeks to explain to the other why he is in error. Our moral talk has a structure presupposing that the correct answers are in principle accessible to all. Moral judgement is objective and the object of moral enquiry and judgement is to establish the facts of the matter - or at least aiming to get closer to an understanding thereof. '(T)he way in which we conduct ourselves in living the moral life seems to presuppose that these (moral) facts are available to all...we seem to think that moral questions have correct answers!'⁷

If morality is objective in this way, then it makes sense of the idea of progress as well as the possibility of error. Pointing to the parallel with scientific progress the realist may suggest that things can improve morally as we come to acquire moral knowledge. Just as science progresses as our theories approximate more

closely to the facts about the natural world, so we can progress morally as we gain in our moral knowledge. Of course the possibility of moral progress and improvement through a growth in knowledge is not to say that progress will be smooth, easy or sustained. The realist point is not that we are making inevitable moral progress, but that there is an explanation available of what it means to talk of such progress.

For present purposes let us grant that there is a *prima facie* motivation for realism. Its opponent is well stocked with arguments to show that we ought to understand morality in terms of subjective opinion, expressions of attitude and emotion and in terms of defeasible social conventions. I shall leave to another occasion the positive arguments for anti-realism. In the remaining sections of the present article I turn to a challenge that the realist must immediately answer: what kind of facts are these allegedly moral facts? For in the absence of a satisfactory response the initial motivation to be a realist may drain away.

IV What kind of facts?

A realist who is a naturalist holds that moral facts are identical with (or reducible to) natural facts. Moral propositions report or describe how things are in the world - what moral properties are possessed by a person or state. Moral properties such as goodness are just natural properties (or a complex of natural properties). A natural property is the kind which features in, is the subject matter of the natural and social sciences. In stating a moral truth I am describing how things are from a perspective of moral concern or interest. In explaining why torture is wrong I employ moral

concepts rather than give a technical neuro-physiological account of the brain states of the victim. However, my moral judgement describes a naturalistic state of affairs. Moral properties and the facts about morality are not special or *sui generis* in the sense that they refer to states of affairs which transcend or fall outside of the scope of the natural and social sciences. While moral facts are a distinct class of facts about the normative and evaluative dimension of events, character, judgement and states they are not mysterious in the sense that true moral propositions refer to states, properties or facts which are not natural.

An Aristotelian, for example, regards the good or virtuous life to be one in which the individual exhibits a certain complex of natural properties - manifest in the development of their character (psychology). A hedonic utilitarian identifies goodness with happiness. A more sophisticated articulation of naturalism in ethics through a form of consequentialism sees the property of being good as the property of conducing to the prevalence of a complex and clustered group of properties of things which go to satisfy important human needs.⁸

A naturalistic approach explains the metaphysics of moral properties - they are identical (or reducible to) with natural properties - and it explains how we can come to have knowledge of them. We can know about the moral facts via the same (sensory) means through which we gain knowledge of any other natural fact. Now, this is not to say that moral knowledge is easily gained, but that there is nothing mysterious involved in obtaining it. Perhaps, we shall need to combine the best scientific and moral theories to make epistemological progress in ethics.

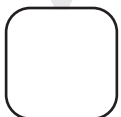
An influential criticism of naturalism from within the realist camp was famously developed by G.E. Moore in the early years of the twentieth century. His challenge was to the very possibility of identifying moral and natural properties.⁹ Moore believed that much of ethical thinking about the nature of moral judgements rested on what he called 'the naturalistic fallacy'. Simply put the 'fallacy' is committed in the identification of the simple, non-natural property of goodness with some natural property. Moore defines naturalism in terms of that which can be the object of experience and which is the subject matter the natural sciences and also psychology.¹⁰ According to Moore most philosophers have conflated the property of goodness with the things that possess it or with some other property(s) that good things have.

It may be true that all things which are good are also something else...But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not 'other', but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the naturalistic fallacy.¹¹

Moore's positive thesis concerns the nature of 'good'. We cannot define 'good' in more basic terms because it is a simple and unanalysable property. Engaging in certain actions may be virtuous because they bring about states that are good in themselves. A right action is one that produces the greatest possible amount of that which is good in itself. To be good is to possess intrinsic value. Moreover, we know a good action or state when we encounter it. Moore suggests an analogy with colour. We can come to know what 'yellow' is through direct acquaintance with yellow objects. No definition of yellow (in, say, terms of wavelength) can convey to someone who has never encountered it what yellow is. In this respect good is like yellow. You only know it when you encounter it. While yellow is a simple natural property, goodness is a simple non-natural property. A natural property like yellow, being desired or being productive of happiness exists in space and time and can feature in the empirical investigation of the world. A non-natural property will not show up when we examine the structure of the natural world. All there is to be said in our empirical investigation of nature can be said in the language of science (not quite how Moore puts the point).

What then is the relationship between the natural and non-natural properties or facts? After all, if two sets of natural facts are identical we should hold that the moral facts are the same. For if two states are identical with

respect to the natural facts, then there seems to be nothing salient which could give rise to a difference in the moral or evaluative quality of the states. Consider, two identical instances of torture being inflicted upon the innocent. Here the realist can appeal to the notion of supervenience, which was introduced into the contemporary philosophical lexicon by Hare (not a realist), according to whom all evaluative predicates supervene on the 'descriptive' characteristics of something. This is the thesis that one domain of phenomena (D1) depends entirely on another (D2) even though there are no systematic links between them, and in particular even though there is no causal relationship between D2 and D1. The state of D1 is given by the state of D2, and there can be no change in D1 without some change in D2 (although the converse relation does not hold). No two things (e.g. persons, acts, states of affairs) can differ in evaluative terms without also differing in their non-evaluative properties. Although the term was never used by Moore, the idea of a non-reductive relation of dependency is reflected in the anti-naturalistic thesis that 'good' stands for a non-natural property.¹²



[Moral Facts]

How are we to account for moral knowledge if moral facts are non-natural? Moore holds that when we are presented with something good our judgement of value is self-evident. In judging something to be good – to use a Moorean example, that artistic beauty is good in itself – is to possess a belief I just know to be true, but for which there are no further reasons to be given. This appeal to self-evidence may not strike you as compelling. What if A and B sincerely disagree over what is self-evident?¹³ We might insist that something be said to elucidate how it is that one just knows of certain judgements that they are true. Moore uses the term 'intuition' to refer to our direct awareness of goodness. However, he is not suggesting that we have some special faculty of moral intuition or perception (akin to say sight) through which we cognize moral truths. As he says, 'when I call such propositions 'Intuitions' I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof: I imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them'.

U The Open Question Argument

The key element in Moore's criticism of naturalism is his Open Question Argument ('OQA'). Suppose, Moore says, goodness were identical with some other property. Let us say that goodness is identical with the promotion of happiness (His own example is what we desire to desire). Now 'good' and 'happiness' are synonymous and every competent speaker would therefore know that:

NI good = df the promotion of happiness¹⁴

It now follows that to ask 'is that

which promotes happiness good?' demonstrates a lack of understanding or sense on the part of the enquirer. It is not a real or live question. For, given our definition of good, it is just the same as asking 'is that which is good, good?' However, Moore explains that it is always an **open question** to ask of some act or state whether it is good or not. To ask if promoting happiness is good is always a live or open enquiry. So, 'good' does not just mean the promotion of happiness (or whatever natural property(s)) and NI is false.

One criticism faced by the OQA is that it does not establish what is needed to rule out a naturalist realism. The naturalist claim it challenges is that moral facts and properties can be identified with non-moral, natural facts and properties. That is a metaphysical thesis. Perhaps all the OQA can establish is that moral and non-moral terms are not synonyms or interdefined; it does show that NI fails to express an analytic judgement. Understanding what one term means does not entail that one understand what the other means. A genuinely 'closed' question is whether a bachelor is an unmarried. I can only ask this question if I am not a competent user of the term 'bachelor'. In learning what the word means I just learn that a bachelor is an unmarried male. However, it is clear that not all meanings (or truths) are analytic in this way.¹⁵ To point out that it is not analytic that good is the promotion of happiness does not yet establish that the moral fact is not just identical to a natural one.

Let's consider non-moral cases. I may know a lot about vixens. They are animals, they eat chickens and people have hunted them. Yet, I can still sensibly ask whether a vixen is a female fox should I be ignorant of that fact about foxes. Of course, once I

learn that 'vixen' and 'female fox' refer to the very same kind of beast the question falls away. Once I come to understand the term 'vixen' I cannot fail to know that this is a female kind of beast. Likewise, a person ignorant of modern chemistry may know a great deal about water yet sensibly ask in his first science class whether the wet stuff of his acquaintance is H₂O. Empirical investigation is required to establish the facts, to illuminate how things are. So with moral facts. The metaphysical truth of what they are cannot be simply read off from the words we employ. 'Good' may not be synonymous with the 'promotion of happiness', but they might both refer to the very same property. NI should not be seen as stating a proposition which is analytic – true in virtue of the meanings of the terms or symbols involved. Rather, such a statement is a synthetic one. Further, given the necessity of identity, a naturalist might go on to argue that a moral property is identical with a natural one and that this is an *a posteriori* necessity.

The response to the Moorean challenge is to note that the central element in realism is a metaphysical thesis. A moral (M) and natural property (N) may be identical. However, the fact of the identity does not entail that M and N possess the very same meaning. It is not an analytic truth that M is N, it does not follow from the meanings of the terms involved. Nor is it knowable *a priori* that M = N. Here, the naturalist can point to the similarity with other cases of property identity: for example, the property of being water and the property of being H₂O; or temperature and mean molecular kinetic energy. From the meaning of the first term I cannot just read off the second. Instead I have to go and discover (say by paying attention in science classes)

that the terms refer to the very same thing.

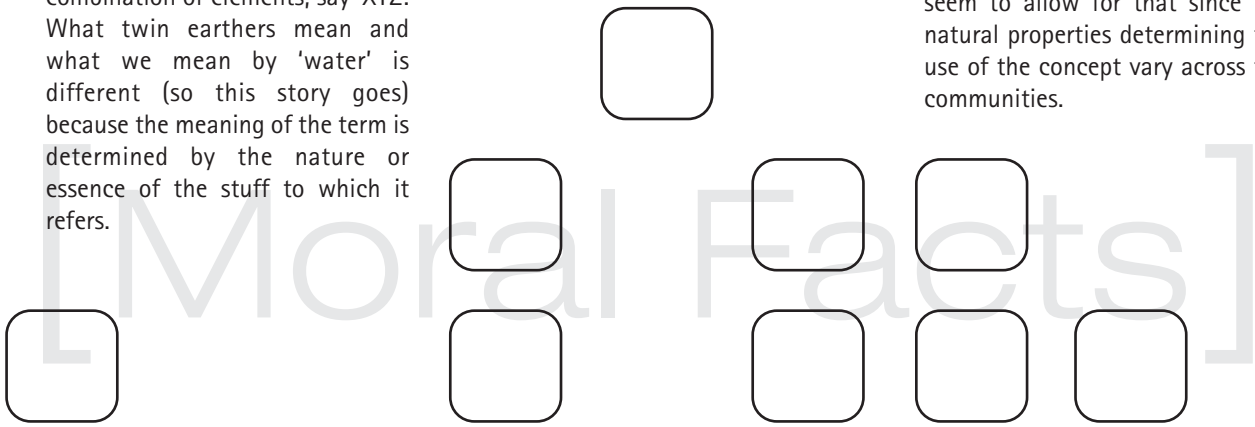
However, this form of naturalist response may itself face problems. 'Good' is just not like water or heat or any other natural kind term¹⁶ in a way that allows it to be analysed in the same kind of way and to preserve the character that realism requires of it. Very roughly here's how such an argument might go.¹⁷

- Water picks out the wet stuff which is H₂O and has done so since we began to employ the concept. Our use of the concept is directed by the nature of that stuff. At some point we discovered the chemical composition of water and so learnt that water is H₂O.
- We can imagine a distant world, Twin-Earth,¹⁸ or remote part of this planet isolated from the rest of us, in which 'water' refers to the wet, odourless and so on stuff which directs or determines the use of the concept. The twin earth term 'water' figures in the lives, descriptions and explanations of the people there just as water does in ours. However, while all else in the same on twin Earth as it is here, the wet stuff on Twin Earth has a completely different chemical composition. It is composed of some other combination of elements, say 'XYZ'. What twin earthers mean and what we mean by 'water' is different (so this story goes) because the meaning of the term is determined by the nature or essence of the stuff to which it refers.

- This might cause some confusion at first and we might appear to disagree about the meaning of 'water'. However, such disputes are resolved by pointing out that the terms, the concepts employed and the thoughts in our heads are actually referring to different stuffs. I don't think that my twin earth interlocutor is wrong when he talks of 'water', but that he is talking about something else.

Now, let's grant that here (on Earth; in our moral community) the property of being right is identical with the property of promoting happiness. After much investigation it has turned out that the utilitarians were correct all along. We can imagine a community (on say moral Twin Earth) in which the concept of right is identical with something else - for example, Kantian deontology or the promotion of the glory of the philosopher king or the assertion of individual power. As in the water case the term 'good' and the cluster of moral concepts around it play the same kind of role on Twin Earth as moral concepts do on Earth. Just as in the water case there are different properties responsible for the use of and denoted by the shared, orthographically identical term. However, the parallel with the natural kind term cannot be sustained.

- In the utilitarian world it is good or right to help strangers because it promotes general happiness. On moral Twin Earth let it be good to exploit strangers because goodness is the property of asserting individual power.
- On arriving in the other community you can check with your hosts that your grasp of the term 'good' is shared. All agree that it just means 'the most general term of commendation', and you can agree that the moral terms play the same kind of role in both communities - for example to praise and blame, determine the justice of actions and so on. Yet, they would be puzzled by the instances in which you use 'good' and you would be equally surprised when they employed it.
- The states that determine the use of good and right are radically distinct for the different communities. If, as in the water case, we are to explain away the appearance of disagreement, then this suggests that naturalistic arguments tend towards a radical relativism. If on the other hand we hold there to be genuine disagreement, then we must mean the same thing by terms such as 'right' and 'goodness'. Yet, this metaphysical naturalism does not seem to allow for that since the natural properties determining the use of the concept vary across the communities.



The argument aims to suggest that even when a natural property directs and controls the use of a moral concept, the identity of goodness with such a natural property does not capture fully what we understand and mean by goodness. Is this a good argument against naturalist realism? What can the realist say? There is more to be said here of course. For the moment, though, I want to briefly address the naturalist claim, dismissed rather quickly earlier, that realism is in the business of providing an informative, reductive analysis of moral concepts.

VI Definitional naturalism

Definitional naturalism is

(T)he view that we can define moral terms exclusively in terms apt for describing the subject matter of the natural and social sciences. The catch cry of definitional naturalism is not just analysis, but *reductive* analysis. We must first define moral terms in non-moral terms, and then we must make sure that all of the non-moral terms in our definition are themselves thoroughly naturalistic.¹⁹

Moore thinks it is not possible to give a naturalistic definition of a moral term (M) such as good.²⁰ If we define 'good' as some natural property (N), it nonetheless does not seem contradictory to assert that something, x, has N but is not good. However if there is such a naturalistic definition of M, then it would have to be self-contradictory to assert that x has N, but is not M just as it is to say that Bob is not unmarried, but is a bachelor. The force of the OQA against definitional naturalism hangs on the premise that there is no naturalistic definition of good such that it is a

contradiction to claim that x has N but is not good. Moore's challenge is that in providing a conceptual analysis of the concept of goodness we are unable to capture our understanding of it in naturalistic terms.

The definitional naturalist is engaged in conceptual analysis. Quite in general this involves furnishing an analysis or explanation of a concept, C, through the use of another concept(s), C1. Examples include the analysis of knowledge as justified true belief, the analysis of material objects as statements about sense data, the analysis of mental states as (complex) dispositions to behave. In all such cases it looks like an open question can be asked. This points to what has come to be known as the paradox of analysis.

- In looking to analyse C we seek a concept C1 that will provide us with something new and informative about C.
- The claim then that C is analytically (definitionally) equivalent to C1 must be unobvious, and so informative.
- But, C1 must really be analytically equivalent to C and so it cannot really tell us anything we don't know already.

So, either the attempt to provide an analysis of concepts does lead to an open question and to the failure of a definitional analysis or analysis is just trivial and uninformative. After all, knowing that bachelors are unmarried tells us nothing about the world.

Does this suggest that the OQA is still on its feet? That is too hasty. We might regard this kind of naturalistic conceptual analysis as aiming to explain (in less problematic terms) the set of beliefs and judgements which constitute the possession of a concept,

C. Such an analysis may well be unobvious and it will be informative. Moreover, a full grasp of the analysis will foreclose the question of whether some x falling under C also falls under C1. The burden may well be on the naturalist to furnish such an account. However, Moore's argument (and indeed Ayer's later employment of it for anti-realist ends), does not do enough to show that there will always be an open question. Perhaps, everything we say about x in terms of C can be said in terms of C1. Indeed, to the extent that we can analyse x in less philosophically problematic terms, the employment of C1 is arguably to be taken as progress.

Moore was, though, on to something important in the OQA. Perhaps, the problem is not that there is always the open question of whether, notwithstanding that x has N, x is M. Instead, it may be that in providing a naturalistic analysis of M, something essential in our characterisation and understanding of M is lost.

VII Against non-naturalistic realism

Ayer believed he has a quite devastating criticism of a realist claim that moral facts are non-natural.²¹ Such purported facts violate the principles of logical positivism and so are meaningless. According to positivism a sentence is factually significant if and only if the proposition it expresses is empirically verifiable – at its most basic a proposition is verifiable only if there are observation statements against which its truth or falsity can be tested. Since Ayer took non-naturalism to entail intuitionism – the thesis that we have a faculty of moral intuition or sense that allows us to cognize moral

truths - there would appear to be no way to verify the truth or falsity of moral claims against empirical data. That I utter that something is good can be verified, but the self-evidence of the judgement I make through my possession of moral sense eludes any such criterion of meaningfulness. It will suffice for the moment to observe that a criticism of non-naturalism grounded in a (now) controversial and problematic theory of meaning is hardly obviously compelling.²²

Unsurprisingly, these remarks do not leave non-naturalism in the clear. What Ayer was right to worry about was how the non-naturalist can account for the realist claim that we can have knowledge of the moral facts, and how those non-natural moral facts relate to or fit in to the natural world. A focus for these worries is provided by the claim that the moral facts supervene on the natural facts (this is often put in terms of the evaluative or normative facts supervening on the descriptive facts). The realist supposes the following claims are true.

- (Sup) Moral facts or properties supervene on natural/descriptive ones.
- (Equiv) No two things exactly similar in their natural properties can differ solely in their moral ones.

The first claim seems incontrovertible if the realist wants to locate the moral facts within the spatio-temporal realm in a way that relates them to objects and actions in nature. Indeed, 'everyone agrees that the moral features of things supervene on their natural features....It is an *a priori* truth'.²⁴ The second claim seems essential to any realism. If Bob, in a particular set of circumstances (C), kills old ladies for fun and we judge it to wrong, then when in C Mary also kills old ladies for fun we must also judge her actions to be wrong.

The non-naturalist makes the further claims that:

- (NN) Moral facts or properties are not identical with natural ones.
- (MK) In gaining moral knowledge we do not infer the moral facts from the presence of natural properties.

The non-naturalist holds that the relationship between natural and moral properties is not a causal one. The natural properties involved in the killing do not cause the wrongness of the action. Rather the wrongness consists in (somehow) the killing, or that the killing gives rise to (somehow) the wrongness. Nor is the natural-non-natural relationship one of logical entailment. It would not involve a logical contradiction hear the tale of Bob and conclude that his actions were right or that he is good man. Nor do we somehow infer from the presence of certain natural properties

the moral facts at hand. When I see the gang of children viciously burn the dog my knowledge that they are doing wrong through being wantonly cruel is not arrived at by a process of inference. Instead, I judge or 'see' that they are wrong immediately from their actions. A comparison with aesthetic experience is open to the realist. We do not infer the face and beauty of the Mona Lisa from the arrangement of paint strokes, but rather we see the face.²⁵

These two claims express the autonomy of moral facts and properties. Yet MK is in tension with Equiv. If the wrongness of Bob's action is not to be inferred from its natural or descriptive properties then its possession of a particular moral property is not entailed by the action possessing certain natural properties. So, Bob and Paul may act in exactly same way in the same circumstances (i.e. share exactly the same descriptive or natural properties) yet not share the same moral property. If the non-naturalist denies Equiv, then he must also give up the supervenience claim.

The critic can also press the question of what special faculty we must possess in order to see the moral facts. If we somehow read off the moral character of a situation from the non-moral facts, then what is the relationship between them and the person making the judgement?



Furthermore, while all sides may agree that two situations identical in every descriptive respect cannot differ just in their moral properties, the non-naturalist still owes an account of the relationship between the natural and the moral facts. It is not just that we know of particular situations with which we are actually confronted that they have a certain moral character, but we form judgements in reflection and imaginative reconstruction. Since the relationship between the natural and moral properties is neither a causal one nor one of logical entailment, the explanation of why a certain configuration of natural facts is accompanied by or gives rise to certain moral facts continues to be absent. As it stands non-naturalism seems unable to explain why it is *a priori* that the moral facts supervene on natural facts. The intimacy between the natural and moral facts is, on the face of things, left mysterious.

In sketching the motivation and challenges moral realism faces I have failed to do justice to the sophistication, range and complexity of the positions that characterise meta-ethical enquiry. That task is yours, and in approaching it you may find it helpful to consider where the challenges adumbrated here leave the realist thesis.



Notes

- 1 In talking about morality in a very general way, I make no attempt to draw any distinction between 'morality' as rule based and 'ethics' as a way of being or outlook. For a discussion of the relationship between ethics and morality see chapter 1 (esp pp.6-7) of Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985).
- 2 One might immediately enquire whether they must come together. That is a discussion for another day.
- 3 Must this lead us to the correspondence theory of truth? That is to a theory of truth which maintains a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to the facts/states/how the world is - pick your favoured truth maker. See Geoffrey Thomas *An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Duckworth, 1993) pp.118-120 for related discussion. On truth makers see Peter Simons 'Criticism, Renewal and the Future of Metaphysics', *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2004).
- 4 For an influential statement of such a red-blooded realism see Mark Platts, 'Moral Reality' in his *Ways of Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1979).
- 5 Dancy's entry on moral realism in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy is an excellent introduction to this topic. A fine and comprehensive overview of contemporary metaethics is Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).
- 6 An objection to moral realism due to John Mackie is that moral properties would just be too 'queer' in the sense that they would be so very different from the kinds of things we find in the natural world. See his *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977) chap. 1. Mackie takes it that realism about moral properties would require moral facts to be about Platonic forms - objects outside of space and time. Therefore, according to Mackie it is mysterious how such facts fit into a naturalistic account of the world, our knowledge of it and of how such facts could be essentially motivating.
- 7 Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) pp. 5-6.
- 8 C.f. David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 9 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).
- 10 Ibid. §25-26
- 11 Ibid. §10
- 12 A point Moore makes in his 1922 'The Concept of Value' in *Philosophical Studies*.
- 13 For a clear discussion on the problem posed by Moore's suggestion (§86) that judgements of value are just self-evident see Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 2nd Edn pp. 161-162.
- 14 In defining a term (A) one provides an equivalent term (B) that can replace the defined term (A) in all contexts in which it occurs without changing meaning or truth value. The symbol for this is '=df'.

15 An analytic proposition is one whose truth is determined simply by the concepts used in their expression. An analytic statement such as 'nothing is blue and not blue' is true just in virtue of the meanings of the words involved.

16 The simple idea is that a natural kind represents a real division or cleavage in the world to which our taxonomic scheme must conform if it is to accurately report the ordering of things. A natural kind records a real distinction in nature around which theories are constructed. It would seem then that natural kinds are to be contrasted with categorisations produced through convention or to serve some interest or function. Note that the distinction between natural and non-natural kinds recalls Locke's distinction between real and nominal essences. The former is whatever it is that accounts for the characteristic form and nature of some kind of thing, whilst the latter is merely the set of properties by which we distinguish objects belonging to that kind. Diamonds may be characterised in terms of their hardness, transparency and clarity, but their real essence is given by their microstructure, which reveals that they are carbon. Once we have the facts about something's microstructure we can class it

together with other individuals of that type, and the question of whether something counts as one of this kind becomes answerable by whether it bears the appropriate sameness relation with respect to its essential (microstructural) properties. In virtue of the nature of a kind predicates about things of this kind can be formulated and (successful) predictions made possible; a kind's real essence underwrites the lawlike possession of properties and the characteristic behaviour of tokens of that kind.

17 See Horgan and Timmons 'Troubles on Moral Twin-Earth: Moral Queerness Revived' in *Synthese* 92, 1992. Their view goes much less roughly.

18 c.f. Putman and his famous Twin Earth thought experiment in 'The Meaning of Meaning'

19 Smith op cit. pp.35-36.

20 It is interesting to note that A.J.Ayer makes use of the OQA in *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936) in order to oppose realism in favour of his expressivism. The realist thesis that moral judgements describe or report the facts is, Ayer claims, caught on the horns of a dilemma, which it is unable to escape. Naturalism succumbs to the Open Question Argument and

commits the naturalistic fallacy (so, to that extent Ayer agrees with Moore). Non-naturalism is rejected because it violates the principle of verification.

21 Ayer op cit. chap 6.

22 For a defence of Ayer and positivism see Pierre Cruse, 'On Language, Truth and Logic', *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2004).

23 In the following I draw on the discussion in Thomas op cit. p.121.

24 Smith op cit. pp.21-22.

25 Platts op cit. draws on such a comparison. Does this help the realist?

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[Moral Facts]

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Martin Bertman

[Sport:]

Essentially Described

Sport is an artificial social product, a sub-set of the category of games. It is therefore open to an epistemological essentialism, which may be contrasted to an ontological essentialism suggested in the Platonic tradition. An epistemological essentialism, like ontological essentialism, presents clear characteristics of a rule determined order and therefore normative structure. Bracketing an ultimate or hoped for ontological essentialism, even with natural matters, this has been adumbrated by the Eleatic Stranger in Plato's late dialogues: *Sophist* and *Statesman*. It is the method of Hobbes in claiming a science of politics. Historical states and historical games called sports may lack certain characteristics of the normative definition; depending on the cultural allowance, some of these may be allowed as sport. The essential epistemological method therefore results from interest and is useful when its range embraces the most important historical characteristics of the matter, which narrows arbitrariness. Further, it provides a clear measure for considering candidates for the defined matter and distinct boundaries for those things that fall outside its regulative structure. The essential definition of sport is made by constitutive rules that create such a clear and distinct norm.

Let us consider it. Sport implies an independently created world, that is, a particular sport is always created by

definite rules for determining the order and boundary of play or action. These constitutive rules are for a contest whose goal is victory. In Greek, *athletos* means competition for the sake of victory. In a complex sport, especially team sports like football, in addition to constitutive rules, there are also many regulative rules, useful but less fundamental. Their task is to maintain and temper the integrity of play within the constitutive rules, e.g. time-outs, out of bounds, etc. When the constitutive rules are changed, a new sport is produced; this is not the case with the less structurally important, more flexible regulative rules.

The policing function for both types of rules demands the authority of a referee or judge. The judge is outside the order for play but necessary by enforcing it, in the course of play. Sport is ideational; a sport demands the specific nexus of its particular constitutive rules and play within those rules.

A fundamental corollary of the idea of sport is that any specific culture is merely a secondary condition determining its norm, despite its economic, technological and aesthetic influence. The sociological or cultural mode undoubtedly influences normative attitudes toward sport, especially about its social value. Economic, religious, political interests and ideologies do affect sport, particularly in terms of the psychology of the audience. Nevertheless, from

the viewpoint of its essential determination, that is, formally, a sport is independent of cultural factors. The historical expression that suggests a trans-cultural orientation by universal biological capacity is simple sports, like running and lifting competitions, which express primary physical capacities. The ancient Olympics, in its religious cultural frame, lasting from 776 b. c. for 1030 years without interruption, provides the closest historical viewpoint for the epistemological definition of sport.

Another fundamental aspect about sport is that it is psychologically attractive to human beings by providing both stable rules in partnership with the excitement of play to bring a measure of unpredictability. One cannot predict who will have the victory. The outcome is a combination of skill, the harder to measure emotional strength of the competitors, and fortune. Indeed, this combination of the known and unknown allows sport to be a symbol of the social order because merging conditions of a structured known, in the civil law, and a contingent unknown, the various actions of citizens, are the factors of political action.¹

Indeed, most social forms provide expectation – legal systems, economic principles, customs like those of hospitality, dress, and sexual relations have a measure of formal or informal rules to guide expectations; yet,

compared to the constitutive rules that create a particular sport, they are less stable, less independent, and consequently more ambiguous. Unlike sport, social orders, without a choice to do so, are open to the fundamental transformation of structure by unpredictable conditions; further, these social structures are not very structured, often made of compromises, they have ambiguity and contradictions that drive change. Nevertheless, cultural rules have some gravity to stabilize an evolving social and political situation. Firmer in creating an order for action, sport can stand in a symbolic relation to these fungible orders.

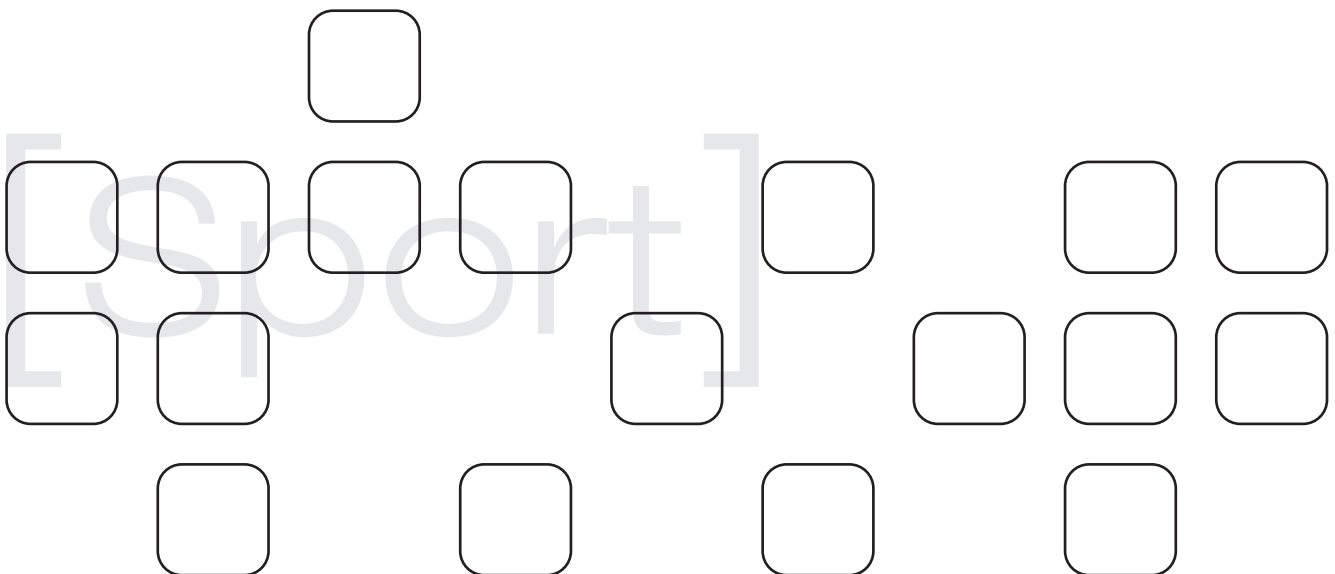
The importance of this symbolic relation is sport captures the ontology of the human condition and the psychological response to it. It can represent the tension between stability and uncertainty in action because rules do not make for a mathematical determination in action, a leaden deadness. It is a game without an algorithm offering the specific action of an excitement in the

present moment of play, the excitement of action.

Now, I shall elaborate on its structural character. Sport is a physical game, but the game theory is applicable to human activities aside from sport; specifically, it is similar to a legal system or order. Therefore, sport's defining characteristics must be given beyond the formal characteristic of being a game or universe of rules within which activity necessarily takes place; further sport must be considered beyond its efficient characteristic of competition, since that also applies to activity within a legal system and many other systematized activities. By the way, the ancient Olympics had a decisive notion of competition, which, unlike the modern Olympics, only honored the winner, not the runners-up.

An appropriate characterization of sport provides an understanding of competition. The material characteristic of various sports is not helpful for this task. Equipment and the nature of the field of play is not helpful because it defines use without

the rigor of relating use to specific rules and, if it did, that would not provide an essential definition but only a specific one of a particular sport. Indeed, material conditions vary greatly from game to game. Wittgenstein has brought to attention that games have their activity in a variety of formalized conditions, i.e. as board games or on some sort of field, say a track or a ring or a rink: a designed or ordered physical area, composed of various numbers of persons, using living and not living equipment, etc. Consequently, the mentioned characteristics are too wide to define sport. Put briefly, Wittgenstein's skepticism about an essential definition of game, of which sport is a sub-division, misfires because of his attention to specific differences among sport. The historical survey defies unification and, like Wittgenstein, those that appropriate this method fall back on social conventions.



In seeking an essential definition, let us narrow the universe of discourse somewhat by considering sport's need of an authority for judgments, the above reference to referee or judge. Authority protects and interprets rules by attending to play within them. Many games like chess or card games are contests and competitions but they are not a sport, since in such games the rules are known in principle to the competitors and no authority is necessary to judge any action within the game; the policing is done by the players themselves. Further, many non-sport games are algorithmic, whether in terms of a human competitor like chess or a machine competitor, like packman.

Notably, by the introduction of an authoritative judgment for a warranted action of a game, we understand that practice or self-orientation in a mere physical exercise is not sport. One's competition with oneself may be preliminary to a sport or merely an aesthetic or health activity. It lacks competition among separate individuals for victory. Notably, the rather dull-minded Latin slogan of the modern Olympics, 'citius, altius, fortius' (faster, higher, stronger), does not present a more informative value than the betterment of physical performance. It suggests a conceptual laxity of our culture.

In any case, what is important for the further characterization of sport is to differentiate the sort of authoritative judgment involved in sport from other judgments in systematic or quasi-systematic activities. At first sight, the referee may be considered to have a minor role in the sport because the referee is compared with the competitors of the sport. However, his importance is crucial. He is the 'ideal spectator' whose judgment asserts the structure of the game as it is

instantiated in actual play. Because the judge in sport – a referee or umpire – is in a primary sense, under the clarity of constitutive rules, his or her intent is to be clear in making decisions as much as possible. Therefore, the condition for measurement is important; consequently, quantitative rather than qualitative considerations must determine sport, though an actual sport may provide some allowance for a small qualitative factor, assuming cultural generosity.

In sum, the primary task of the judge is whether a particular play is in concert with the rules that constitute the universe of the sport. Only in a secondary sense, when penalties are assigned, is there a distinct qualitative aspect to judgment within rules. These regulative rules are similar to rules about such matters as the presentation of evidence and other procedural matters in a court of law – regulative rules – rather than about the constitutive rules of civil law, the business of a Supreme Court. Judging involves clarity; thus, say ice dancing, whose performance aspects for victory include music, grace, costume, is a contest whose qualitative margin invariably depends on cultural aesthetics, which are moot. The clarity necessary for sport is muddled. Such contests, some allowed by cultural conventions to be called a sport, is unlike a foot race or a discus throw. The victor in these is the first that passes the finish or throws the furthest, without consideration in the judgment for victory of the grace of the performance.

In contrast to sport, there is no need to have a referee in some games. Games of blind chance are certainly not sport since they involve no exercise of ability; on the other hand, card games, chess, etc. involve intellectual

competence and thus are competitions with the goal of victory but their play does not need a referee because all their rules are constitutive and, in play, immediately known to the players.

Another matter, one of value: all games, including sport, no matter how strenuous, or how they relate to the social processes of work and finance, are for the sake of refreshment or entertainment, in principle. According to the Greeks, games and sport are not work since they are for the sake of honor; the Greeks distinguished *baunistic* from dynamic activity on an elitist principle is rather lost or misplaced in our culture. The former is grunt labor the other is action for the sake of honor. Since sport need not be done for survival, it falls into an activity whose action is done for the better in principle, particularly, for the sake of honor. Indeed, in the pagan world, honor is in the mode of a pagan culture with its nature religion. Victory in sport is a proper relation to nature, a sort of worship. This was a perspective of nature in its 'positive' gifting of the human condition.

Further, the Greek Olympics were a time of truce, the forbidding of war and was only for free men, not slaves. Competition in sport is not rivalry, with its negative intent to win at any price, say like the gladiatorial contests of the Romans where all were slaves of the Emperor and, in principle, loss could mean death. Consequently, without competition there is no sport therefore the love of sport implies friendship bond to the competitor who is necessary for the activity.

Certainly, when speaking of values, no sociological consideration would discount the business of sport with its various promotional and financial activities. Indeed, granted the expected financial rewards for winning athletes of the ancient

Olympics, gain as well as honor has always been a motive of athletes. It is a grandmother's tale that even the best in human beings throws the shadow of the worst. However, these 'human-all-too-human' motivations are tangential to the activity itself. Similarly, for a physician, whatever his personal motivations for being one -wealth, social prestige, etc. - these are tangential to the professional or structural obligation to treat his patient toward better health. Sport in a sociological description of its character and tendencies in a particular society is an additional topic of research but tangential to its essential structure. Some of the specific cultural determinants of sport, like any social activity, are in tension with an ideal descriptive or normative approach to the activity. Under the influence of Baron Coubertin, starting with the first modern Olympics in 1896, the modern Olympics tries, with little success, to restrain financial gain and commercialism by pressing for amateurism.

Beyond pointing out the limits of sociological or historical examples to offer a universal and essential notion of sport, I do not want to pursue value questions beyond pointing out that sport competition seen in the ancient Olympic orientation provides the ground for a work-ethic about sport. This is not quite an ethics but is sufficient for the normative narrowness of an epistemologically essentialist notion of sport. Competition ordered by what we intuitively call 'sportsmanlike behavior' or fairness about the equal condition to prove the quality of a victor is the condition of the activity. Importantly, with some further considerations about social behavior, the normative 'work-ethic of sport can expand to project a normative character for sport audiences.

in terms of a physical powers or skills, between or among human beings, where a referee enforces constitutive rules creating the structure of a particular sport and regulative rules aiding play. The important psychological concerns that sport structure provides is stability. Stability is in the known order of the structure that provides for the undetermined, excitement of play. The action of play is always open to unexpected possibility, e.g. the physical injury of an athlete, the unexpected expression of capacity of an athlete, etc. The psychological combination of stability and the excitement of play, with its unpredictable quality, are psychologically satisfying to human beings.

What I now wish to do, in consideration of the above remarks, is to provide the essential definition of sport and, then, to classify four broad sub-classes of sport. The definition: Sport is a class of games, where there is competition, under equal conditions, for a quantitatively measured victory,

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[Sport]

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This definition provides the normative ground to examine the sub-classes of sport. The four are single individual sport, team sport, animal and human collaborative sport, and machine and human collaborative sport. The first marks the Olympic attitude; individual contests and is the best expression of the normative definition. It is noteworthy that the laurel of victory was given to the winner of Olympic competitions, with the exception of the chariot race. In this collaboration among man, machine, and animal the owner and not the driver gets the laurel.

Let us consider team sport. Here the responsibility is no longer on the individual who competes for victory. One has a social effort where even the non-directly playing strategic coach is a factor for victory. This is more than a trainer of an individual; the strategic coach is a direct factor of the play. Consequently, responsibility in the team is projected to a social organization. With the complexity of team-sport, like in other complex political associations, there is the matter of proper relations among players. An added dimension of sportsmanship demands the struggle for victory obliges the individual players to sacrifice personal advantages (say for glory) for the sake of the most efficient strength of the unit's performance. With the complexity of multiple individual actions in the course of play, the role of the referee becomes more crucial and the regulative rules, e.g., offsides, physical improprieties, etc., are more elaborate. Yet, team-sport still functions closely to the normative definition.

The non-human collaborative sport classes have a specific problem that slides them into not being sports at all. It is when the animal or machine

overwhelms human qualities in the competitive unit. Let us consider, man-animal sport. Of course, the essential definition precludes animal against animal contests to be a sport. In say cock fighting, there is a human trainer, but the so to speak 'responsibility' for the action is animal. Let us consider the sport of horseracing with a jockey. Here the skill of the jockey counts toward victory. Yet, in this class of sport, the factor of the non-human obscures the condition of human competition. A good jockey on a bad horse or vice-versa changes the outcome.

With machine-sport, the imbalance in the collaborative unity is further exacerbated. Granted, our ever increasing technological sophistication, the human element can recede or slide to the point where it no longer plausible to account it and therefore to have a sport under the essential definition. If not in car races, in airplane and boat races, the machine can be so sophisticated that the human input occurs in only unusual and extreme circumstances, say of weather. Further, the responsibility for victory in machine-sport becomes enlarged and, consequently, vague. Machines depend on what John Dewey called 'social intelligence.' They are the product of technological workers in the social-political complex of industry and government. The car race, aside from the driver, and his team to service the car, the workers, engineers, and inventors of metallurgy, electrical systems, aerodynamic design, etc are responsible for the machine component of the competitive sport unit. In machine-sport, the human element expands in responsibility, while the machine aspect of the unit tends to overwhelm the human aspect in the actual collaboration at the actuality of the race. Further granted

that technology is a social product such sports live with a disallowing condition in fact for some human beings. It is unlike the biologically simple sports, e.g. running, which is open to all human beings both in principle and in fact. This suggests a cultural rather than physical disallowance; the latter is exemplified by basketball played between a Zulu and pigmy team.

Of course, not all machines in sport are collaborative. They are tools. For example, a discus or javelin thrown is a mere tool. The broadly similar tool presents the human capacity within the contest. If target shooting uses the same gun it is a tool; however, in gun contests, even using dissimilar guns but within an allowable range of difference, the skill of the shooter dominates the contest and one cannot therefore consider the gun a machine collaborator. The same is true of sophisticated machines like boats.

However, in the last instance, one notes another factor that diminishes the test of some specific human capacity between individuals. The playing field can be strikingly different. The change of weather affecting performance brings an element of chance into play that is quite great in qualifying human capacity. There is a violation of equal conditions; yet, one might plead leniency and consider even such a boat race a sport, taking it under the rubric of fortune, to which all sport action is subject.

To continue with considerations of stretching or moving beyond the boundary of sport, I shall elaborate on the mentioned aesthetic qualitative matter. Aesthetic theory has three value foci: the artist (here the value of sport to the athlete), the audience (here the sport spectator), and the created object or work of art (here,

this formal focus is either the game played or the schema of constitutive rules that creates the game). Of course, the best theories try to satisfy all three foci, e.g. Aristotle's *Poetics*.

If we take aesthetic in a large psychological sense as in its first use from the Greek *aisthesis* (perception) by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, a German philosopher of the first part of the 17th century, we capture an ease for further theorizing about sport. Though my present interest is in terms of the boundary of the essential definition of sport, it is important to say immediately that the aesthetic aspects to athlete and spectator of play are valuable and merit consideration in complete theory of the value of sport. This sort of theory would move toward the psychological factors that include an enlarged sense of perception, which mingles aesthetic and ethics in a viewpoint about what is proper for human action and concern. As mentioned, in a narrower consideration that the judgment of contests of the perception of quality must be disputed. Consider: aside from chauvinistic loyalty or political hanky-panky, say French, Chinese and Russian judges of music and dance have different cultural inclinations on which their judgment is grounded. This could make a difference in those sports where the aesthetic spectacle is part of judgment for victory. Consequently, when the determination of the victory in the contest has little

physical quantification, e.g. ballroom dancing falls too far away from the essential definition to be a sport.

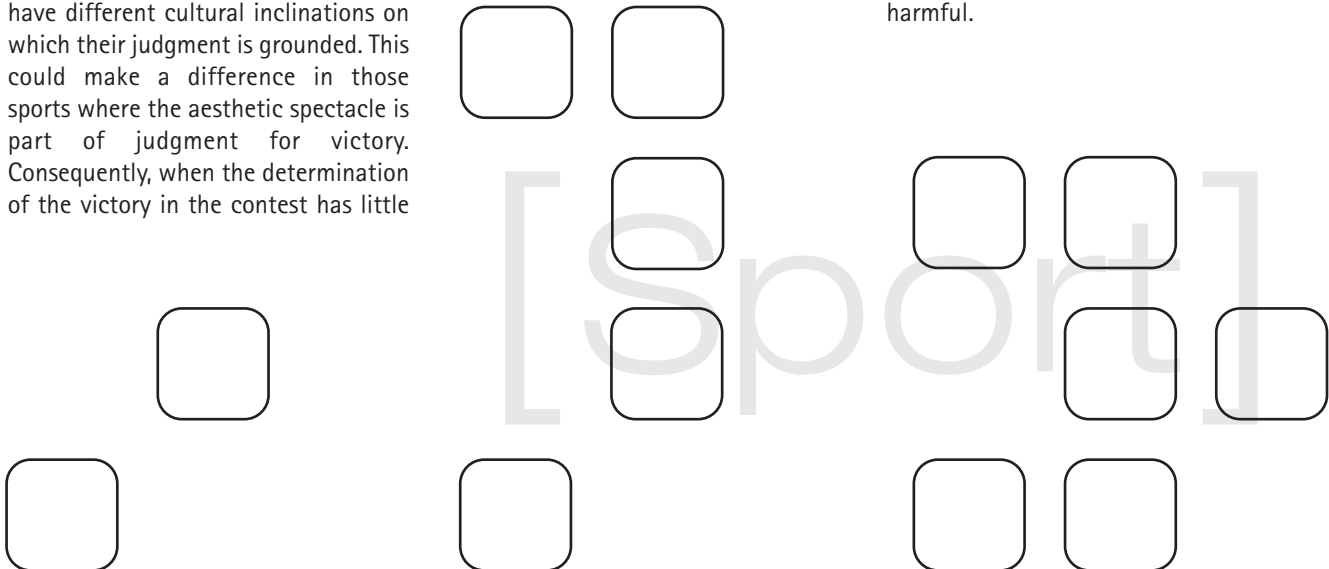
To characterize the boundary considerations in the last three subclasses of sport implicitly I have employed principles of equality, proportion or balance, and responsibility. These principles bridge a task-ethic and a full ethic of human activity. A determinative justification of them deserves discussion but that would involve a length of time not available here. Principles of equality, proportion and responsibility elaborate the conceptual understanding of sport. They are in a dialectical relation to sport definition and the systematic elements of a particular sport. Within a systematic and functional understanding of sport, responsibility is a work-ethic concept, the relation of action to sport structure in a functional determination; however, when related to social matters it moves toward a more ethical engagement. Responsibility is an aesthetic qua ethical quality of action; since action necessarily results from intention, responsibility is necessarily purposive.



Proportion or balance provides an intellectual condition for action whereas

the principle of equality is a boundary determiner of fairness. Prudence is the human response to human limitations. Prudence accepts modes of human constructions for achieving limited grounds for pleasure and need: these are structured orders with a final causal goal. Many activities, including sport, are appropriate within the largesse of the penumbra of the human condition, a pragmatic seeking for balance, responsibility and equality. This allows limited purpose; it allows the appreciation of sport within a sense of limited value that speaks to the boundaries of the human condition.

Principles of responsibility and balance extended moving from larger consideration to sport find it reasonable, within the measure of such allowance. Of course, the reasonable is open to some dispute within its direction toward strictness. However, it seems that balance allows toleration for what is not definitely harmful.



The partnership of participating entities of sport relates proportional involvement of human skill to the capacity of the other elements of the combined entity: the ordering of powers for victory. However, since sport disallows the human factor to become submerged as primary factor by either machine or animal, there seems no exact formula for the proportion of a collaborative unity.

The principle of proportion, grounded in prudence, is intimate to the principle of responsibility. In a broad sense, responsibility for an athlete is a work ethic or task-responsibility. The human will functions directly in the competitive entity when played to make sport not merely a social product but a direct human action. The fundamental responsibility is a commitment to obeying the rules of a sport, as well as act in terms of player's function for victory. Thus, the three principles enlarge the application of rules of the game. The Greek language has the words for cause (*aitia*) and responsibility (*aitios*) correlatively interlocked. In a word sport implies a moral agent capable of sportsmanship and taking on a role in a responsible manner within the rules of play.

These three principles illuminate and extend in detail the essential definition of sport and qualify play. They persuade but, since they are not a proof and merely move in the range of prudence, that persuasion is debatable: it may not produce conviction. Yet, every culture must necessarily employ them under an aesthetic or perception of the prudential functioning for its sports. That enlarged sense of aesthetic, with both conventional and biological considerations, is a psychology that must judge whether sport is an activity that is worth the individual's time.



Notes

- 1 It is notable that Hegel's final political determination of the state has just these qualities, though it seems unlikely to be achievable within nature. The artifice of sport is more closely expressed in Hobbes' notion of the constructed state but his view that the natural theorems and the laws of the state are harmonious is an obvious leap into a normative ideal as well. Cf. my *Hobbes: The Natural and Artificed Good* (Lang: 1981).

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ISSN: 1477-6480